

EXEGETICAL GUIDE



Ephesians 4:1-6



**BE UNITED
IN CHRIST**

Be United in Christ

Exegetical Guide

Ephesians 4:1-6

BE UNITED IN CHRIST EXEGETICAL GUIDE

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Exegetical Guide Ephesians 4:1-6
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Be United in Christ

Exegetical Guide

Ephesians 4:1-6

Walking in Unity

Christians are called to enjoy the riches of the gospel and therefore must live lives worthy of this calling. This means treating other believers with humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love. Christians must diligently preserve the peace and unity that the Spirit creates, intentionally living out in practice the oneness that exists in God and in His church.

God saves individuals but does not want them to live individually. Believers are to live together in a visible, loving unity that reflects and honors the loving unity between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are unified in love, and so the members of Christ's body must be unified in love. The only way for Christians to live in a manner worthy of their calling is to Be United in Christ.

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HOW TO USE A BE UNITED IN CHRIST EXEGETICAL GUIDE

An exegetical guide models how to study a passage of Scripture. The Introduction provides the context, while **Connection to Be United in Christ** highlights the text's importance for Christian unity. The Passage presents the Biblical text being studied.

We begin by **Studying the Passage** because God's messengers must convey God's words accurately. The Passage Comparison presents the text in its original Greek or Hebrew alongside seven English translations. Comparing translations allows for a better understanding of the passage and provides insight into the intent of the original Biblical manuscripts. The Structural Layout divides the passage into its component parts, because to understand what God said we must understand how He said it. It is an essential step in Bible study, but do not be discouraged if this section seems unfamiliar or daunting. The Narrative Flow explains the Biblical author's flow of thought through the passage. The Passage Overview then presents a simple outline that will form the foundation of subsequent outlines and the sermon manuscript itself. The Passage Focus distills the text into a statement that will be the main idea of the sermon. We then identify several Resources to further your study.

Having studied the passage, we are ready to begin **Preparing the Sermon**. Good preaching feeds God's people on God's Word, so our messages must be both healthful and appetizing. This is why this section begins by laying out several Sermon Ingredients that will be used to prepare a nutritious and appealing message. We must present God's Word accurately and clearly so that God's people will understand it with their minds, embrace it in their hearts, and apply it to their lives. The Passage Outline presents the passage's structure and flow while the Passage Details provide the grammatical, historical, and theological information needed to understand and teach the passage. The message is then fortified with Applications and seasoned with Illustrations. These ingredients are combined to prepare a spiritual meal to feed God's children. The Sermon Outline rephrases the Passage Outline to make it more understandable to an audience. The Sermon Manuscript for Your Use then offers an example of how the passage might be preached. Then we identify several Sermon Examples that model good preaching on the text.

Thus, an exegetical guide presents both a comprehensive analysis of one particular Bible passage and a model for studying and preaching Scripture. We pray that God will use this guide to promote love for Him, fidelity to His Word, and unity in His church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	6
Connection to Be United in Christ	7
Passage: Ephesians 4:1-6.....	7
The Church in Ephesians.....	8

STUDYING THE PASSAGE

Passage Comparison.....	10
Structural Layout.....	12
Narrative Flow.....	13
Passage Overview.....	13
Passage Focus.....	13
Resources.....	14

PREPARING THE SERMON

Sermon Ingredients.....	16
Passage Outline	16
Passage Details	17
Applications.....	21
Illustrations.....	22
Sermon Outline.....	22
Sermon Manuscript for Your Use.....	23
Sermon Examples.....	31

INTRODUCTION

Ephesus was a thriving port city located on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. It was a wealthy and influential trading center that was also the political capital of the province of Asia. In the first century, it had an estimated population of 250,000, which made it the third largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. Its theater seated 24,000, its stadium was 250 yards long, and its Temple of Artemis was the largest building in the Greek world and one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Thus, Ephesus was a strategic city from which Christianity could spread to the surrounding regions.

Paul passed through Ephesus briefly on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-21), and when he returned on his third missionary journey, he stayed for more than three years (Acts 19:1-41). Rioting crowds forced him to move on to Macedonia, but he met with the elders of the Ephesian church on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of 57 (Acts 20:17-38). He also sent his disciple Timothy to Ephesus to minister in his absence (1 Timothy 1:3). So, when Paul wrote his letter to the church at Ephesus around 60–61 while a prisoner in Rome, he was writing to a community that he knew and that knew him well.

After a customary greeting (1:1-2), Paul blesses God the Father for the glorious salvation accomplished in Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:3-14). He thanks God for the believers at Ephesus and prays that they will be able to understand the wondrous riches of the gospel made available in Christ (1:15-23). Paul reminds them that God's salvation is a work of sheer grace (2:1-10) which forms a new community in Christ (2:11-22). Paul then announces God's inclusion of the Gentiles in His promises (3:1-13), and he prays that his readers will be rooted in and appreciative of Christ's love (3:14-21). Thus, the first half of Ephesians presents the glorious truths of God's saving work in Christ.

In the second half of his letter (Chapters 4–6), Paul urges and instructs his readers to respond practically to the truths he has just presented (Chapters 1–3). He implores them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, diligently preserving the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ (4:1-16). They are not to walk according to their old ways (4:17-32) but in love and in light (5:1-14). They are to walk in wisdom, filled by the Holy Spirit, who transforms their church, family, and work relationships (5:15–6:9). Paul cautions them to arm themselves against the devil's schemes (6:10-20) and then closes with a final word of encouragement, blessing, and greeting (6:21-24).

Connection to Be United in Christ

Paul's passionate plea in Ephesians 4:1-6 is for Christians to live in a manner worthy of their calling, which means living in visible, loving harmony with other Christians. God Himself exists as a loving unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all three persons of the Trinity work to establish unity between believers. God the Spirit places Christians in the body of Christ, secures their shared hope, and produces unity in the church. God the Son unites in Himself those who are identified with Him through faith and baptism. God the Father is the ultimate author and basis of oneness in the church. Christians are not commanded to attain unity but rather to live out in practice the unity that the Father, Son, and Spirit have already established in the church. God who exists in unity has united Christians to live in unity, and therefore Christians must diligently strive to Be United in Christ.

PASSAGE: EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.¹

¹ While there are many fine Bible translations, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) is used here for its consistent, word-for-word translation.

THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS

In the Book of Ephesians, Paul describes the church as the body of Christ as well as a new person, kingdom, family, temple, and bride. All these images convey the centrality of Christ to the nature and function of the church. Christ is the head of the body, the creator of the new humanity, the Lord over the kingdom, the firstborn in the family, the cornerstone of the temple, and the loving husband of the bride. In response, the church is to be a healthy body, a holy humanity, a loyal subject, a loving sibling, an excellent building, and a faithful, beautiful bride.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the **church**, which is His **body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (1:22-23)

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into **one** and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 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, and might reconcile them both in **one body** to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (2:14-16)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints, and are of God's **household**, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole **building**, being fitted together, is growing into a holy **temple** in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a **dwelling** of God in the Spirit. (2:19-22)

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the **church** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. (3:8-10)

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, to Him be the glory in the **church** and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (3:20-21)

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the **body** of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a **mature man**, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole **body**, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the **body** for the building up of itself in love. (4:11-16)

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the **church**, He Himself being the Savior of the **body**. But as the **church** is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the **church** and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the **church** in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the **church**, because we are members of His **body**. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the **church**. (5:23-32)

STUDYING THE PASSAGE

Ephesians 4:1-6

Walking in Unity

PASSAGE COMPARISON

Ephesians 4:1-6

The Passage Comparison presents the original Greek text alongside seven English translations. Comparing translations allows for a better understanding of the passage and provides insight into the intent of the original Biblical manuscripts.

GREEK	NASB	ESV	KJV
¹ Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε,	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,	¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,	¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
² μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραύτητος, μετὰ μακροθυμίας, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ,	² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,	² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,	² With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
³ σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης·	³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
⁴ Ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν·	⁴ <i>There is</i> one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;	⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—	⁴ There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
⁵ εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἓν βάπτισμα,	⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,	⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,	⁵ One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
⁶ εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν.	⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.	⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.	⁶ One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

NKJV	NRSV	NIV	NLT
¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,	¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,	¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.	¹ Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.
² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,	² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,	² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.	² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.
³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.	³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.
⁴ <i>There is</i> one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;	⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,	⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;	⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.
⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;	⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,	⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;	⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
⁶ one God and Father of all, who <i>is</i> above all, and through all, and in you all.	⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.	⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.	⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

STRUCTURAL LAYOUT

The Structural Layout shows how the passage fits together. The left column contains the Biblical text divided into its structural elements. Main clauses are aligned left, related elements are highlighted in color, and words added for clarification are placed in brackets. The right column explains how the various elements function in context.

1	Therefore	“Therefore” connects the two halves of Ephesians. Chapters 4–6 express the practical implications of the theological truths revealed in chapters 1–3.
	I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you.....	This is the main subject and verb for verses 1-6, which are one sentence in the Greek.
	to walk in a manner worthy of the calling.....	“To walk” completes the thought of the main verb “implore,” while “worthy” indicates the kind of walk Paul urges.
	with which you have been called.....	This clause modifies “calling,” a word that occurs four times in this passage in different forms.
2	with all humility and gentleness, with patience,	These two prepositional phrases state three characteristics of a worthy walk.
3	showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.	These two adverbial phrases state two means to achieve a worthy walk.
4	There is one body and one Spirit,	Verse 4 introduces a chain of seven “one” statements arranged in three groups related to the three persons of the Trinity, starting with the Holy Spirit.
	just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;	“Just as” indicates a comparison between this clause and the preceding clause.
5	[There is] one Lord, one faith, one baptism,	This resumes the chain of “one” statements begun in verse 4. “Lord” is a reference to God the Son, Jesus Christ.
6	[There is] one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.	This is the last of the string of seven “one” statements and focuses on God the Father. “Who” refers to God the Father, and the four prepositional phrases emphasize His sovereign relationship to everything.

NARRATIVE FLOW

As one imprisoned for Christ's sake, Paul implores his readers to live lives worthy of their calling as Christians (v. 1). A worthy walk is characterized by humility, gentleness, and patience (v. 2a) and is achieved by means of showing loving tolerance and by diligently preserving the unity produced by the Spirit and displayed in peace (vv. 2b-3).

Christian unity is based on the Trinity: the one Spirit who places believers in the body of Christ and secures the hope of their salvation (v. 4); the one Lord with whom Christians are identified through faith and baptism (v. 5); and the one God and Father of all who is over, through, and in all (v. 6).

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ephesians 4:1-6 has two main sections:

- I. CHRISTIANS MUST WALK WORTHILY IN UNITY (4:1-3)**
- II. CHRISTIAN UNITY IS BASED ON THE TRINITY (4:4-6)**

PASSAGE FOCUS

Christians must walk in unity based upon their calling and their relationship to the Trinity.

RESOURCES

Basic Resources

- Liefeld, Walter L. *Ephesians*. IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Ephesians*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986.
- Snodgrass, Klyne. *Ephesians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Intermediate Resources

- Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.

Advanced Resources

- Hoehner, Harold W. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.

PREPARING THE SERMON

Ephesians 4:1-6

Walking in Unity

SERMON INGREDIENTS

Ephesians 4:1-6

PASSAGE OUTLINE

I. CHRISTIANS MUST WALK WORTHILY IN UNITY (4:1-3)

A. The Standard of a Worthy Walk (4:1)

1. The twofold basis of a worthy walk
2. The content of a worthy walk

B. Three Qualities of a Worthy Walk (4:2a-b)

1. A worthy walk is humble and gentle
2. A worthy walk is patient

C. Two Means to a Worthy Walk (4:2c-3)

1. To walk worthily, Christians must lovingly show tolerance
2. To walk worthily, Christians must diligently preserve unity

II. CHRISTIAN UNITY IS BASED ON THE TRINITY (4:4-6)

A. Unity Is Based on the One Spirit (4:4)

1. There is one body
2. There is one Spirit
3. There is one hope

B. Unity Is Based on the One Lord (4:5)

1. There is one Lord
2. There is one faith
3. There is one baptism

C. Unity Is Based on the One God (4:6)

1. There is one God
2. The Father of all is over all, through all, and in all

PASSAGE DETAILS

Ephesians 4:1

Therefore

This conjunction connects chapters 1–3 with chapters 4–6. The first half of Ephesians presents the central doctrines of the gospel, and the second half explains the duties that correspond to these doctrines.² The order is significant. Paul does not first present ethical demands and then offer gospel blessings as a reward. Rather, Paul begins with God’s gracious initiative in Christ and then explains how people should gratefully respond to receiving them. “In Paul’s thought, and especially in Ephesians, a changed life comes before good behavior. The new identity in Christ is what produces the good works.”³

I, the prisoner of the Lord

Ephesians is one of the four Prison Epistles of Paul (along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), so-called because it was written while he was in prison in Rome. Paul had already indicated that he was a prisoner (Ephesians 3:1), but he restates his circumstances here to strengthen the appeal he is about to make. God’s blessings are worthy of complete commitment and sacrifice, whether this means persecution or obedience.

“The Lord” refers to Jesus Christ. Paul makes clear that he is in prison for the cause of Christ.

implore you

“Implore” means “to urge strongly, appeal to, exhort, or encourage.”⁴ Paul is passionate about the instructions he is about to give.

The pronoun “you” is plural. Paul speaks collectively to everyone who has received the gospel call.

to walk in a manner worthy

“To walk” completes the thought of “implore” and refers to a person’s ethical behavior. “Walk” is a good metaphor for personal conduct because it suggests active, moment-by-moment progress toward a destination on a chosen path alongside chosen travel companions. Paul tells his readers to “walk no longer just as the Gentiles” (4:17) but to “walk in love” (5:2), to “walk as children of Light” (5:8), and to walk as the wise, not the unwise (5:15).

The phrase “in a manner worthy” is one word in the Greek. Paul uses it five times, three times in connection with the verb “to walk” (Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12). It was originally associated with scales where one side balanced out the other. Paul is asking believers to balance their conduct (chs. 4–6) with God’s blessings (chs. 1–3). As Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required” (Luke 12:48b).

² This doctrine-duty division is indicated by the fact that 40 of the 41 commands in Ephesians occur in chapters 4–6.

³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 228.

⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Fredrick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 765. This important reference work is the standard dictionary of New Testament Greek and is commonly referred to as BDAG after its four editors.

of the calling with which you have been called

The standard of Christian conduct is the calling with which they were called. The word “calling” occurs three times in Ephesians (1:18; 4:1, 4) and refers to an invitation to a “special privilege and responsibility.”⁵ It pertains to God’s call for individuals to enter into a privileged relationship with Him (Romans 11:29; 1 Corinthians 1:26; 2 Peter 1:10). Having revealed the blessings that come from being called into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (chs. 1–3), Paul now explains the types of lives that should characterize those who have been so blessed.

Ephesians 4:2

with all humility and gentleness, with patience

Verse 2 contains two parallel prepositional phrases that indicate three qualities of a walk/life that is worthy of having been called into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Everyone called by God to enjoy the blessings outlined in Ephesians 1–3 must live lives characterized by all humility, all gentleness, and with patience (see Colossians 3:12-14).

“Humility” is a lowliness of mind that is the opposite of being conceited or selfishly ambitious (Romans 11:20; 12:16; Philippians 2:3). Believers are to put on a heart of humility (Colossians 3:12), knowing that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34).

“Gentleness” is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23) that characterized Christ (2 Corinthians 10:1) and should therefore characterize believers (Colossians 3:12; Titus 3:2), especially when correcting other believers (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:25).

“Patience” is the “state of being able to bear up under provocation.”⁶ It is a beautiful quality perfectly modeled by God (Romans 2:4; 9:22; 1 Peter 3:20) and Christ (1 Timothy 1:16; 2 Peter 3:15) that is to be exercised by Christians (2 Corinthians 6:3-6; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12), especially Christian leaders (2 Timothy 4:2). When other believers are not humble or gentle, then patience and tolerance are the appropriate Christian responses.

showing tolerance for one another in love

“Showing tolerance” means to put up with or endure someone or something. It is patience put into practice. This is a means by which Christians conduct themselves worthy of their calling.

Christians are not to tolerate each other reluctantly or resentfully but rather “in love.” True love is patient, bears all things, and endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7), and Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other as He loved them (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17). Like gentleness and patience, love is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), who is the source of love, unity, and every Christian virtue.⁷

⁵ BDAG, 549.

⁶ BDAG, 612.

⁷ “The unity that is theirs by virtue of their common experience of the Spirit will be maintained only as the Spirit also produces the virtues necessary for it” (Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 700).

being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

This clause parallels the previous one. Showing tolerance in love and diligently preserving unity are two essential means by which believers walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

The phrase “being diligent” is one word in Greek. This verb is used 11 times in the New Testament, usually in the sense of being “especially conscientious in discharging an obligation.”⁸ Paul tells Christians to make preserving unity an ongoing priority, giving it every energy and effort.

“To preserve” specifies what believers are to be urgently occupied in doing. Here it means “preserve” in the sense of “not losing” (see also 2 Timothy 4:7; Revelation 16:15). Believers are not called to create something but to protect and preserve it, to keep and guard it.

What Christians are to diligently preserve is “the unity of the Spirit.” Unity refers to “a state of oneness or of being in harmony and accord” (see also Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 3:14).⁹ It is “of the Spirit” because it is produced by the Spirit. Christians are not called to create unity but to preserve the unity that Christ accomplished and the Spirit produces. When Christians do not preserve the unity of the Spirit, they dishonor Christ and grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

The word “bond” refers to a fastener that holds objects together. Believers are to put on love, which is “the perfect bond of unity” (Colossians 3:14). “Peace” refers to relational harmony. When believers enjoy peaceful relationships, they exhibit the unity that the Spirit is producing. Thus, “peace is not the ‘means’ to unity, but its primary evidence.”¹⁰ When Christians diligently preserve the unity that comes from the Spirit, they are held together by a bond that is evident in the peace between them.

In the first half of the passage (4:1-3) Paul assumes that Christians will live together in community but will find it difficult to do so. Peace between believers should occur because they are believers but will only actually occur through intentional, diligent, God-enabled effort. Therefore the second half of the passage (4:4-6) provides the theological basis and motivation for the unity commanded in the first half. Seven “ones” are organized around the Spirit (v. 4), the Lord (v. 5), and God the Father (v. 6), for true Christian unity is rooted in the very person of God and in believers’ shared identity in Him. Christian communities must be based on a correct view of God and the gospel, for true Christian unity must be grounded in the truth.¹¹

⁸ BDAG, 939. See also Galatians 2:10; Ephesians 4:3; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:11; 2 Peter 1:10; 3:14.

⁹ BDAG, 338.

¹⁰ Fee, 701, footnote 142.

¹¹ “Christian unity is based on the gospel. It does not begin with a visible, institutional church but with the gospel, which unites saved sinners with Christ and thus spiritually unites them with other born-again believers. Any organization calling itself a church must affirm its belief in the central truths of Scripture, which if genuinely believed lead to regeneration and incorporation into the body of Christ. Any appearance of unity not founded upon God’s truth is a lie, and any promotion or endorsement of false unity is a sin.” This excerpt is taken from the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry’s *Book Summary: The Basis of Christian Unity*, which is available as a free resource at beunitedinchrist.com.

Ephesians 4:4

There is one body and one Spirit

The “one body” is the church (Ephesians 4:12, 16), of which Christ is the head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23). The image of a single body made up of many diverse parts is familiar to every person. Paul emphasizes the unity of the body in verses 1-6 and then develops the idea of its diversity in verses 11-16. Christ has only one body of which every true believer is an integral part.

In Ephesians, Paul highlights the Holy Spirit’s role in sealing believers’ salvation (1:13), granting access to the Father (2:18), indwelling the church (2:22), revealing mysteries (3:5), strengthening the saints (3:16), uniting Christians (4:3), placing believers in the body of Christ (4:4), grieving sin (4:30), filling believers (5:18), inspiring the Word of God (6:17), and prompting and empowering prayer (6:18). The Holy Spirit also produces the fruits of gentleness, patience, love, and peace (4:2-3; Galatians 5:22-23), as well as the virtues of humility, tolerance, and diligence, which are essential to preserving the unity that the Spirit produces.¹²

just as also you were called in one hope of your calling

This clause breaks up the chain of “ones” and shifts to the second person plural “you.” The words “just as” introduce a comparison that supports the preceding statements.

“You were called” and “your calling” relate to 4:1. The phrases reemphasize that the unity that Christians possess is a result of their having been chosen by God to enjoy and embrace the gospel’s blessings and obligations.

“Hope” occurs in Ephesians 1:18, 2:12, and 4:4, and the first and last uses both link “hope” with “calling.” Ephesians 1:18 focuses on God as the caller, and 4:4 focuses on those whom He calls. Both verses teach that a believer’s calling is what produces his hope. Christians have hope because God calls them into a saving relationship with Himself.

Ephesians 4:5

one Lord, one faith, one baptism

The “one Lord” is Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that Christians are blessed (1:3), chosen (1:4), adopted (1:5), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), made alive (2:5), raised (2:6), recreated (2:10), brought near to God (2:13), and reconciled with other believers (2:14-15) and with God Himself (2:16). The Lord is sovereign (1:22), present everywhere (1:23; 2:6; 3:17), and He is head, creator, and cornerstone of the church (1:22; 2:15, 20). Christian unity is based on and motivated by believers’ relationship with Jesus Christ as their one Lord. “Paul follows ‘one Lord’ by enumerating two ‘entry’ experiences, whereby believers become associated not only with their ‘one Lord,’ but also with the ‘one body.’”¹³

“One faith” could refer to the objective content of the Christian faith, the subjective act of believing and trusting in God, or both. Christians are to live in unity because they affirm the same truths and share the same personal trust in and reliance upon God. It is by embracing the objective truths of the Bible that believers have faith in the God of the Bible.

¹² “The central role of the Spirit in all of this can scarcely be missed. Not only (1) is their unity expressly stated as coming from the Spirit, but (2) four of the five graces listed in verses 2-3 are among the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23; and (3) in the Trinitarian confession that follows, pride of place is given to the Spirit, precisely because the one body, which is Paul’s present concern, is the result of their common experience of the one Spirit....” (Fee, 699).

¹³ Fee, 704.

“One baptism” may refer to (1) water baptism, which is closely tied to faith (Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 1:13-15); (2) Spirit baptism, through which a believer is placed in Christ and the church (Acts 11:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13); or (3) baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12). Paul may also have all three aspects in mind. When a sinner trusts in Christ, the Holy Spirit identifies him with Christ, the church, and Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus, Christians are to live in unity because the one Spirit has incorporated them into and identified them with the one Lord. Both these realities are symbolized by water baptism.

Ephesians 4:6

one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all

God the Father holds the position of highest honor and authority among the three persons of the Trinity (Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:1-10). Ephesians refers to God as Father—the source of grace, peace, blessing, love, and faith (1:2, 3, 17; 6:23). The Son and Spirit grant believers access to Him (2:18), and Christians are to be filled with His fullness and to give Him thanks for all things (3:14; 5:20).

“All” is repeated four times in verse 6 to emphasize the Father’s supremacy over all things and His active presence in all things. His sovereignty is expressed through four prepositions: of, over, through, and in (compare Romans 11:36).

APPLICATIONS

- To preserve unity, believers must prioritize their identity as the church rather than viewing their faith primarily as a personal relationship with Christ apart from other Christians. Churches need to start speaking more about the body of believers living as a community.
- Christians need to be educated about the foundations of unity in God and the gospel. Churches need to be more aware of who their God is and what the gospel is in order to more effectively preserve the unity based on the one Spirit, one Lord, and one Father.
- Christians need to be encouraged and disciplined in their walks with Christ so that the fruit of the Spirit becomes more characteristic of their lives. As humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love increase, so will unity.
- Individuals, churches, and denominations should look for ways to foster unity with other believers. This could include prayer meetings, ministry partnerships, joint projects, invitations to functions, co-sponsored engagements, granting access to facilities, shared meals between leaders, combined retreats, and meeting needs in other churches when they arise. Christians living in the same town or city should get to know one another and start working together as an expression of and means to growing in unity.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- The thirteen colonies joined together to form the United States of America. For all their differences and disagreements, the various regions and states realized that they shared a common identity as a nation that must be lived out in practical ways. America's political unity provides many parallels for the church's religious unity.
- The US Civil War illustrates both the tragedy of brothers in conflict and also the principle that unity is worth fighting for.
- The US Marine Corps teaches, "It is obvious that a clear explanation and understanding of intent is absolutely essential to unity of effort. It should be a part of any mission."¹⁴ The church has its explanation and intent defined by the Word of God and must pursue it with unity of effort to accomplish its mission of making disciples of all the nations.
- Mark Twain reported placing a dog and a cat in the same cage to see if they could get along. When they did, he experimented with a bird, a pig, and a goat, and they, too, got along fine after a few adjustments. Then he tried locking a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic in the same room, and soon there was not a living person left.¹⁵

SERMON OUTLINE

Walking in Unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

INTRODUCTION (Image, Relevance, Transition/Overview)

I. THE CALL TO WALK IN UNITY (4:1-3)

- A. The Standard of Our Walk (v. 1)
- B. The Qualities of Our Walk (v. 2a-b)
- C. The Means of Our Walk (vv. 2c-3)

II. THE BASIS FOR WALKING IN UNITY (4:4-6)

- A. Our Unity Is Based on the One Spirit (v. 4)
- B. Our Unity Is Based on the One Lord (v. 5)
- C. Our Unity Is Based on the One God (v. 6)

CONCLUSION (Applications, Illustration, Prayer)

¹⁴ United States Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, FMFM-1 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 1986), 72.

¹⁵ Philip D. Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 33.

SERMON MANUSCRIPT FOR YOUR USE

Walking in Unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

INTRODUCTION

Image: In 2005, a New York judge rendered an unusual verdict that made national headlines. The case involved an unhappy couple who did not want to live together, but who also did not want to leave their home. So the judge approved a plan submitted by the husband to build a wall down the middle of their house. The wife would live on the third floor and half of the second with three of the children, while the husband and a fourth child would reside on the other half of the second floor and the first. And so, in December of 2006, the neighbors gathered to watch workman install a physical barrier between the conflicting couple. The wall did not end the conflict, however. The thermostat control was on the husband's side, and the wife complained that he adjusted the settings to make her miserable. Each spouse accused the other of bugging the phones and spying through video cameras. The wife said the husband paid people to bang on the walls to set off her alarms. After years of fighting, another judge ordered them to sell the home and split the proceeds. After spending millions of dollars in legal fees, their conflict cost them both their marriage and their home.

Those passing by the beautiful Brooklyn brownstone might have envied the happy couple they imagined living inside. A stranger would have seen the husband's regular attendance at the local synagogue and perhaps heard how he fed the poor. The wife's expensive clothes displayed her affluence to the world. Yet soon the rich façade and sad charade were exposed, as were the couple's misery and conflict. Their pettiness and strife embarrassed their family, shamed their synagogue, divided their children, and cost them their home, wealth, reputation, marriage, and happiness. They are a living testimony to Proverbs 17:1, "Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it / Than a house full of feasting with strife."

Relevance: Tragically, this family's sad situation describes many church families as well. Respectable exteriors hide shameful, painful strife within. Beautiful stained glass images contrast ironically with the ugly conflicts occurring inside. The appearance of wealth conceals a deep, spiritual bankruptcy. Though churches may not build walls to physically separate its members, the relational and social walls are just as effective. When believers fight, their pettiness and strife embarrass their Christian family, shame their church, divide God's children, and cost them their peace, joy, credibility, and ministries. Everyone who has experienced church conflict will confirm that better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a *church* full of feasting with strife.

Transition/Overview: The importance of Christian unity is emphasized in Ephesians chapter 4. In verses 1-6, the apostle Paul pleads with believers to live in a manner worthy of their calling, and this means first and foremost living in loving harmony with other believers. Verses 1-3 give the call to walk in unity, and then verses 4-6 reveal the basis for walking in unity. The two sections are closely connected, and, in fact, all six verses are a single sentence in the original Greek.

Let us first look at the call to unity in verses 1-3. In this first section, Paul will state the standard of our walk in verse 1, present three essential qualities of our walk in verse 2, and then specify two means of meeting this standard in verses 2 and 3.

I. THE CALL TO WALK IN UNITY (4:1-3)

A. The Standard of Our Walk (v. 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

The word “therefore” indicates that what Paul is about to say is based on what he has just said. Chapters 4–6 state the implications of chapters 1–3. In the first half of Ephesians, Paul presents the rich spiritual blessings that God gives every Christian. Those who have Jesus as their Savior have been adopted (1:5), redeemed (1:7), forgiven (1:7), sealed and indwelt by the Spirit (1:13, 14), raised with Christ (2:6), saved by grace (2:8-9), brought near to God (2:13), reconciled with other believers and with God (2:14-16), and made citizens of Heaven (2:19), members of God’s household (2:19), and parts in God’s temple (2:20-22). It is in light of these blessings that Paul makes his request. He says in effect, “Here is the appropriate response to what God has done for you.”

Paul also reminds us that he is “the prisoner of the Lord.” The requests he is about to make come from someone suffering in jail for the sake of Jesus, so we should give special consideration to his petitions. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” would have been less powerful if it had been a “Letter from a Birmingham Diner.”

So, on the basis of the blessings of the gospel and his imprisonment, Paul implores us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called.” To “walk” is a reference to a person’s way of life or ethical pattern of behavior. All the way back in Genesis 5, Enoch is said to have “walked with God” (v. 22), and the same is said of Noah, Abram, and Isaac (Genesis 6:9; 17:1; 48:15). “Walk” is a good metaphor for a person’s way of living because it suggests active, moment-by-moment progress towards a chosen destination along a chosen path alongside chosen travel companions.

Here Paul says that a Christian’s walk—his behavior—should be worthy of his calling. The word “worthy” was originally associated with scales on which one side balanced the other. So here is the mental picture Paul is painting. Imagine an old-fashioned set of scales. Now on one side begin placing the blessings that God has freely given you in Christ. In your mind, watch that side sink with the weightiness of your forgiveness, your redemption, your justification, your spiritual rebirth, your adoption into God’s family, your coming resurrection, and your future life in Heaven in the very presence of God. How low does that side of the balance go? Now watch it sink still farther as you add the cross, because all of these blessings that are free for you cost God His Son. See how weighty are the blessings God gives us in Christ, how precious and priceless.

Now ask yourself, what type of life is worthy of all this? What can I do to bring the scales better into balance? What should my values, priorities, and behaviors be to help offset the grace of God in Christ? Clearly, we can never repay what God has done for us. We can, however, commit ourselves to walking in a manner worthy of our calling. But what exactly does this look like? Paul is going to dedicate the last three chapters of Ephesians to outline how we can begin to live lives worthy of our calling as Christians. But notice that the very first thing he tells us to do is to live in visible, loving unity with other Christians. Paul begins by stating three qualities that should characterize every believer to enable them to walk in unity with one another.

B. The Qualities of Our Walk (v. 2a-b)

with all humility and gentleness, with patience

The first of these qualities is humility, a lowness of mind that is the opposite of being high-minded, conceited, or selfishly ambitious. Paul starts with humility because pride is the primary source of disunity and division. Proud people prioritize themselves and insist on being accommodated. When such people get around others, their egos and selfishness make them insensitive of others. They are quick to insult and to feel insulted, so they create conflict wherever they go. For there to be any hope of loving unity and intimate community, there must be humility.

The key to loving relationships, whether between spouses, friends, or believers, is for people to put others before themselves. Paul provides the prescription in his letter to the Philippians.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:3-8)

We cannot be humiliated if we voluntarily humble ourselves. Our pride cannot be pricked by others if we deflate it ourselves. We will not feel slighted by others if we demand nothing from others. Christians must be humble if they are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

The second quality of a worthy Christian walk is “gentleness,” treating others with tenderness and kindness. When young children reach out to touch a baby parents say “soft, soft” and take their hand to show them how to treat delicate objects delicately. In the same way, Christians should treat others softly because egos are fragile and delicate people require a delicate touch. This applies to the words we choose and the tone we use, as well as to our body language and facial expressions. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, / But a harsh word stirs up anger.” So, we want our speech to be especially courteous and considerate, planning in advance the best tone and timing to discuss potentially upsetting topics. Christians must be gentle if they are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

Third, we must interact “with patience,” enduring provocations without being provoked. The word “patience” means having a “long temper,” or as we would say today, a “long fuse.” This phrase creates a helpful image of potentially explosive people with fuses of varying lengths. As Christians, we want our fuses to be long. And damp. And fireproof. The Bible warns us about being quick-tempered, “Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19b-20).

We live in an irritating world with irritating people, and we have been raised to be irritable. Moreover, people today are more offensive and more easily offended. In contrast, Christians must cultivate the ability to stay calm and steady even when they encounter unsettling people and are surrounded by upsetting circumstances. Christians must be patient if they are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

Having stated the standard of our walk (v. 1) and three qualities of our walk (v. 2a-b), Paul next presents two means of walking in a manner worthy of our calling.

C. The Means of Our Walk (vv. 2c-3)

showing tolerance for one another in love

Today, “showing tolerance” means refusing to judge another person’s behavior, values, or views. Biblically, however, showing tolerance means to tolerate the intolerable, to bear the unbearable, and to endure the unendurable. It is patience put into practice. And we cannot show tolerance in love while there is resentment. Love must be the motive behind our patience and the manner in which we display our patience. Marriage and parenting are God’s laboratories that teach loving tolerance. It does not take long for a wedding to become a marriage. Even on the honeymoon, both spouses begin to realize how different the other person is. It takes a bit longer for them to realize that they cannot change the other person, and God uses the resulting irritation and frustration to develop patience. Theoretically, this prepares the couple to have children, where the lessons learned in the boot camp of marriage get utilized constantly in the long, grueling campaign of child rearing. And these same lessons, this same patience and tolerance, must be employed in our interactions with other believers as well. Christians must show tolerance for one another in love if they are to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

The second means by which we walk worthy of our calling is to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Verse 3 contains an action, an object, an attitude, and an evidence.

The action is “to preserve,” to guard and keep something from being corrupted, damaged, lost, or destroyed. Christians are not called to create unity. Paul does not say, “Believers of the world, unite!” Rather, he tells us to protect the unity that God has already provided. God unites Christians, and we are called to progressively live out in practice what is already true of us in Christ.

The object is “the unity of the Spirit,” that is, the unity created by the Holy Spirit. God the Spirit identifies believers with Christ and incorporates them into the body of Christ. As the Holy Spirit unites believers with Christ, He unites them with other believers in Christ. All Christians are fellow members of Christ’s body, fellow citizens in Christ’s kingdom, and fellow family members in God’s household. The problem is, we do not live this way. We act like a body with an autoimmune disease that attacks itself. We live like citizens in a civil war. We fight even though we are family. But the fact that Christians live in conflict and division does not deny the fact that they are, in fact, united. The Spirit creates the unity, and we must be diligent to preserve it.

Diligence is the attitude with which we approach preserving unity. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines “diligent” as “characterized by steady, earnest, and energetic effort.” We often associate the word with an athlete who makes the committed, concentrated effort to achieve success. Paul wants us to take the same attitude and approach to preserving Christian unity. We are to strategize, strive, and sacrifice to guarantee success. And unity requires persistent, painful, and thoughtful work. Christians may be saved sinners, but they remain sinners nonetheless, and sinners are hard to live with. Therefore, we must be diligent to preserve unity. For make no mistake, the devil is diligently trying to divide us.

The evidence of this diligence is “the bond of peace.” As we follow Paul’s prescription for a worthy walk, our relationships will flourish in the loving harmony that God intends. Our marriages, families, neighborhoods, friendships, schools, work places, and church communities will be loving, enjoyable, and rewarding. Relational peace and harmony are evidence that believers are diligently preserving the unity established by the Holy Spirit.

Before we move on, we want to make five observations about the first three verses. First, Paul assumes that Christians will live their lives in loving fellowship with other Christians. God intends Christians to live in community with one another. The Bible knows nothing of Christians living in isolation from other Christians. We are the people of God, the family of God, and the body of Christ, and so we must live our lives in community with one another.

Second, Paul assumes that it will be challenging for Christians to live their lives in loving fellowship with other Christians. Paul is well aware that our sinful selfishness makes it hard for us to get along with others, even other Christians. This is why he gives us these commands, because he knows that we will neither develop these qualities nor use these means on our own.

Third, Paul assumes that Christians can overcome the challenges of living in loving fellowship with other Christians. Otherwise, he would not have given the commands. But, as in every area of the Christian life, we are dependent on God to live in unity with other sinners. Love, peace, gentleness, and patience are among the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Humility, tolerance, and diligence are also the Spirit's work in our lives. So, we can walk in the loving harmony worthy of our calling, but only by God's grace.

Fourth, it is the sinful neglect of some that necessitates the diligent obedience of others. When people are proud, not humble, others must be gentle lest they prick their fragile egos. When people are harsh, not gentle, others must be patient. When people are quick-tempered, not patient, others must be tolerant.

Finally, God treats us in the manner that He demands we treat each other. God is gentle, patient, tolerant, loving, and humble. Therefore, we have the perfect example to show us what a worthy walk looks like. We continuously experience the love and grace that God expects us to show others.

Having given the call to walk in unity in verses 1-3, Paul next explains the basis for walking in unity in verses 4-6.

II. THE BASIS FOR WALKING IN UNITY (4:4-6)

These three verses root the subjective experience and expression of Christian unity discussed in verses 1-3 in the objective reality of God and our relationship to Him. Paul declares seven “ones” grouped around the three persons of the Trinity. Christian unity is based on nothing less than the one Spirit (v. 4), the one Lord (v. 5), and the one God (v. 6), and there can be no firmer foundation on which to base our unity.

A. Our Unity Is Based on the One Spirit (v. 4)

There is one body and one Spirit

The “one body” Paul refers to is the church, of which Christ is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23). The idea of a single body made up of diverse parts is familiar to all of us. Our head tells our hands to serve our mouths, and every part obeys so the body can survive. Paul provides an image of unity that is always close at hand so that every time we feed ourselves, we are reminded that Christians are one body in Christ and therefore must live in loving unity with the rest of the body.

It is the “one Spirit” who places us in the one body of Christ and who gives us spiritual gifts so that we can fulfill our roles in the body (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). The Holy Spirit also instills virtues such as gentleness, patience, and love, which are essential to preserving the unity He produces. Whatever our disagreements, all Christians are united because we are all partakers of the one Spirit.

just as also you were called in one hope of your calling

Paul breaks up his chain of “ones” to remind us of the one hope of our common calling. This is not the first time that Paul has connected hope and calling. In Ephesians 1:18, Paul writes, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling.” Thus, it is the calling that produces the hope. That is, it is because we have been called by God that we have the hope of being with God. Whatever may divide us, all Christians are united because we all have the same hope. We are all bound for Heaven, our true home.

The power of a shared hope to unite people is vividly illustrated by the Battle of Stones River during the Civil War. On December 30, 1862, Union and Confederate forces converged outside of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to engage in three days of hard fighting that resulted in 23,000 casualties. On the eve of the battle, musicians from both sides began playing to lift the spirits of the anxious men. It was not uncommon for musicians in opposing armies to compete with one another like two bands of rival schools at a football game. So, for example, the Northerners might play “Yankee Doodle,” and the Southerners might respond with “Dixie.”

But on that night, with 83,000 soldiers waiting to battle the next day, one band began playing “Home Sweet Home,” which was the most popular song of the Civil War. Then the band from the other side joined in, and thousands of soldiers on both sides sang about their shared longing to go home.

“To thee, I’ll return, overburdened with care,
The heart’s dearest solace will smile on me there.
No more from that cottage again will I roam,
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.
Home! Home! Sweet, sweet home!
There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home.”¹⁶

Union or Confederate, Northerner or Southerner, city slicker or country boy—all differences dwindled in the shared longing for home. In the same way, all the differences that divide Christians dwindle due to our shared hope for Heaven. Every believer wants to leave the war zone of this world and go home to where our heart’s dearest solace will smile on us there, and never again shall we roam.

B. Our Unity Is Based on the One Lord (v. 5)

one Lord, one faith, one baptism

The second basis for walking in unity is in verse 5: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Paul turns from the third person of the Trinity to the second, the Lord Jesus Christ. In this connection, he also mentions the faith that identifies a Christian with the Lord and the baptism through which our saving faith is professed. Faith and baptism identify believers not only with Christ but also with the body of Christ, the church. Every believer comes to the same Lord the same way.

¹⁶ Mike West, “Civil War Soldiers Longed for ‘Home, Sweet Home,’” *Murfreesboro Post*, December 28, 2008, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com>.

All Christians are united because Christ is our Savior and shepherd, our prophet and priest, and our redeemer and king. We who have been saved by Him are connected by our need for Him, our love for Him, and our identity in Him. He gathers us into one flock, one body, and one family. We share a common name because we are all slaves of the same Christ. We celebrate a common communion because we are all participants of the same new covenant. We adorn our buildings and bodies with a common cross, because it is our common boast and message. The essential Christian confession is that “Jesus is Lord,” and every believer shares this confession and commitment to Jesus as Lord of his life. And because our Lord commands us to be unified, Christians must be diligent to preserve the unity that we have in Christ.

Christians also share the common experience of having been baptized as a public sign of their identification with Christ and their incorporation into His body. Faith and baptism are closely connected in the New Testament, and Paul associates them closely here. He does the same in Galatians 3:26-27. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” And so, the one Lord, as well as the one faith and one baptism, provide a central basis for Christians to walk together in unity.

C. Our Unity Is Based on the One God (v. 6)

One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all

In verse 6, Paul presents the third and ultimate basis of Christian unity. The specific phrase “one God” occurs only three other times in the entire Bible (Malachi 2:10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). However, the declaration that there is only one God goes back to Genesis 1:1. Exclusive allegiance to the one, true God is listed first among the Ten Commandments and was repeated twice daily by every practicing Jew (Deuteronomy 6:4). There is only one God, and He commands everyone in His church to live together in loving unity.

Paul adds “and Father” to identify Him as the first person of the Trinity and to emphasize His authority as the one who is the source of and sovereign over everything. The word “all” is repeated four times in verse 6 to emphasize that God the Father is sovereign over all things and actively present in all things. There can be no more enduring and unshakable basis of unity than God the Father.

The term “Father” also reminds us that every Christian is an adopted child of God who belongs to the same family. It is the same heavenly Father who adopts us and to whom we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). When we pray the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), we are reminded that we have siblings. This is why we pray “Our Father,” and our Father demands that His children all get along and live together in loving unity.

CONCLUSION

Applications: So how do we apply this passage to our lives?

First, we must intentionally cultivate the character qualities of humility, gentleness, and patience as essential to walking worthily and living in harmony. If we are proud, harsh, and quick-tempered, then we must confess this to God and address this by His grace.

Second, we must tolerate other Christians lovingly, not because they are tolerable or lovely, but because they are Christian. There is no brother or sister in the Lord whom we can write off, ignore, or mistreat simply because they irritate us. The most annoying siblings are still siblings, and God commands that we bear with them in love.

Third, we must diligently preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity was a priority for Paul, as it is for God. Therefore, unity must be a priority for us. We should pray for it and practice it. We should protect it by pursuing peace. Loving unity with other believers is absolutely essential to walking in a manner worthy of our calling. When we conflict with other Christians, we contradict our calling.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, if you have never admitted that you are a sinner who needs the Savior, then would you this day please place your faith in Jesus Christ and give your life to Him as your Savior and Lord. God is willing to be your Father, but if you reject Him, then you will face Him as your judge. The Spirit is willing to indwell you, but if you reject Him, then you will spend eternity apart from Him in Hell. But if you will trust in Christ alone as the only one who can give you a right standing before a holy God, then you will become a child of God and a member of the family. Please join our family today.

Illustration: I would like to close by comparing unity in the church to unity in marriage. It is God who unites a man and woman as husband and wife, and so sacred is this union that Jesus warns, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6b). The couple enters the church separately, but they exit the church together, sharing the same name as they share the same life. But becoming one is easier than living as one, and so they must work hard at walking in a manner worthy of their calling as husband and wife. They must cultivate humility, gentleness, and patience. They must be tolerant of one another in love, diligently preserving the unity that God established. They are one, and therefore they must live as one. They must walk in a manner worthy of their calling as a married couple.

In the same way, it is God who unites men and women as one body, and so sacred is this union that Jesus’ warning still applies, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6b). We enter the church separately as each one of us receives Christ as our Savior, but we exist in the church together, sharing the same name as we share the same life. But becoming one is easier than living as one, and so we must work hard at walking in a manner worthy of our calling as Christians. We must cultivate humility, gentleness, and patience. We must be tolerant of one another in love, diligently preserving the unity that God established. We are one, and therefore we must live as one. And so let us commit ourselves to walking in unity so that we can walk a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called.

Prayer: Lord, grant us the ability to love our brothers and sisters in Christ as You do. We look to You for the strength to be humble, gentle, and patient with one another, tolerating each other’s faults and striving to maintain the unity that Jesus purchased for His church. Remind us of the one body, the one Spirit, and the one hope of our calling. Let us appreciate our one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. Let us obey the one God and Father of all. Unite us in practice as You have united us in truth. We ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.

SERMON EXAMPLES

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. “Worthy of Our Calling” (Ephesians 4:1-3) and “The Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:4-6). *Westminster Chapel, London*. www.mljtrust.org.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones ministered at Westminster Chapel in London and was one of the greatest preachers of the last century. He preached several messages on Ephesians 4:1-6, two of which are cited here. The first explains the meaning and importance of the Christian calling. The second discusses how the Trinity is reflected in the church and how the church functions as a body.

MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Getting in Step with the Christian Walk. Grace to You*. www.gty.org.

John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in California, preached a six-part series on Ephesians 4:1-6. He focuses on a Christian’s duty to have a worthy walk empowered by God. MacArthur focuses on how a life of obedience and submission to Christ can bring great blessing.

Nelson, Tommy. “The Church’s Unity.” *Denton Bible Church*. www.dbcmedia.org.

This engaging pastor from Denton Bible Church in Texas explains and applies Paul’s command to walk in unity as the means by which Christians walk worthily of their calling.

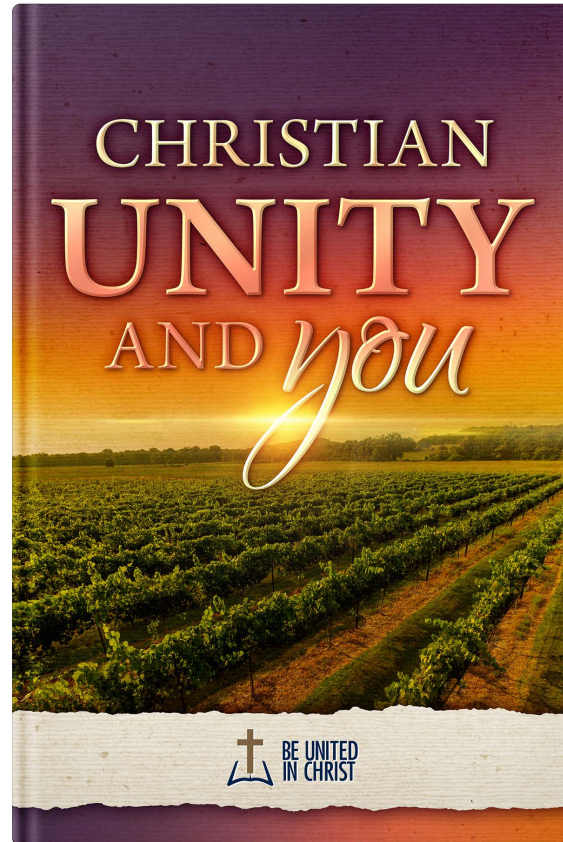
Piper, John. “Maintain the Unity of the Spirit” and “One Lord, One Spirit, One Body for All Time and All Peoples.” *Desiring God*. www.desiringgod.org.

John Piper is pastor emeritus of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the founder of Desiring God. These two sermons present the call to and the basis of walking in unity.

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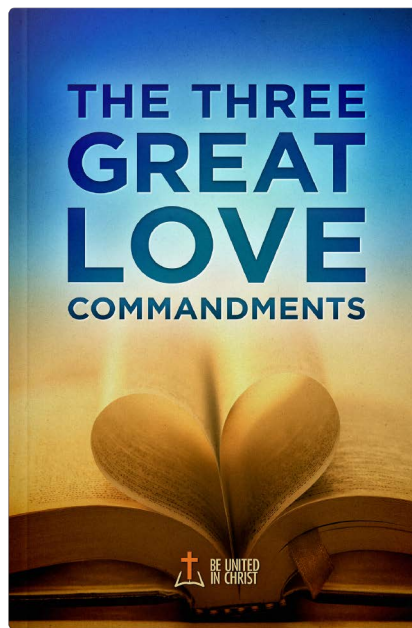
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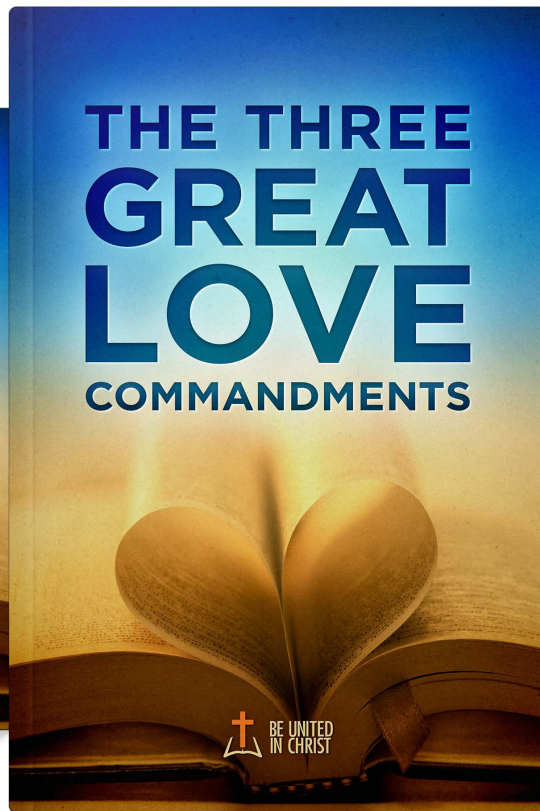
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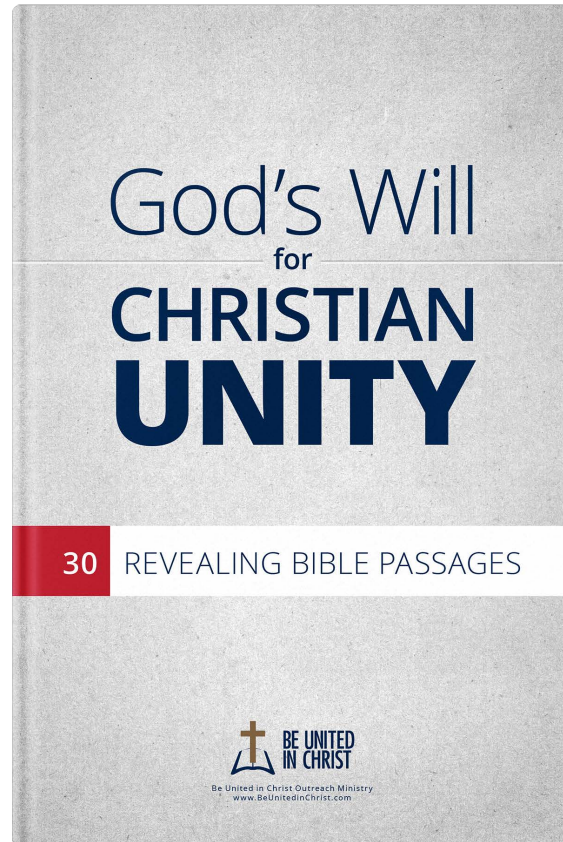
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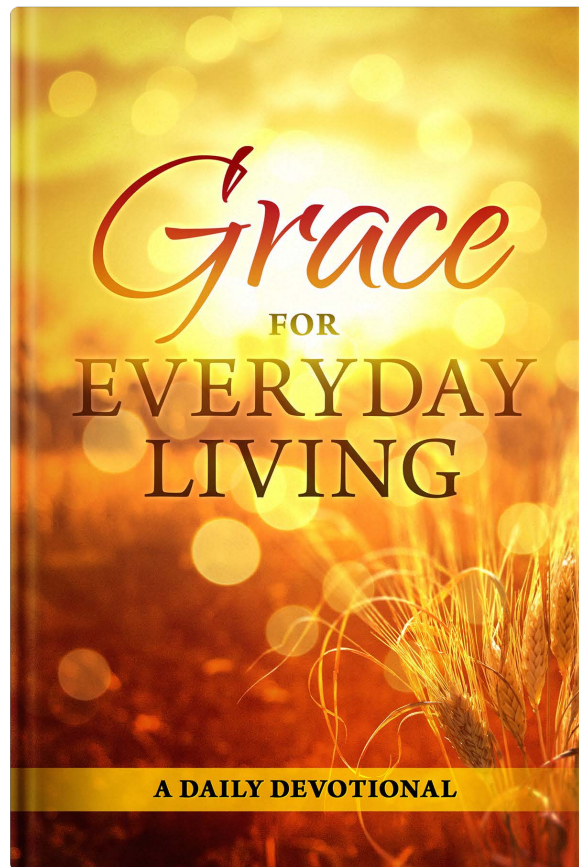
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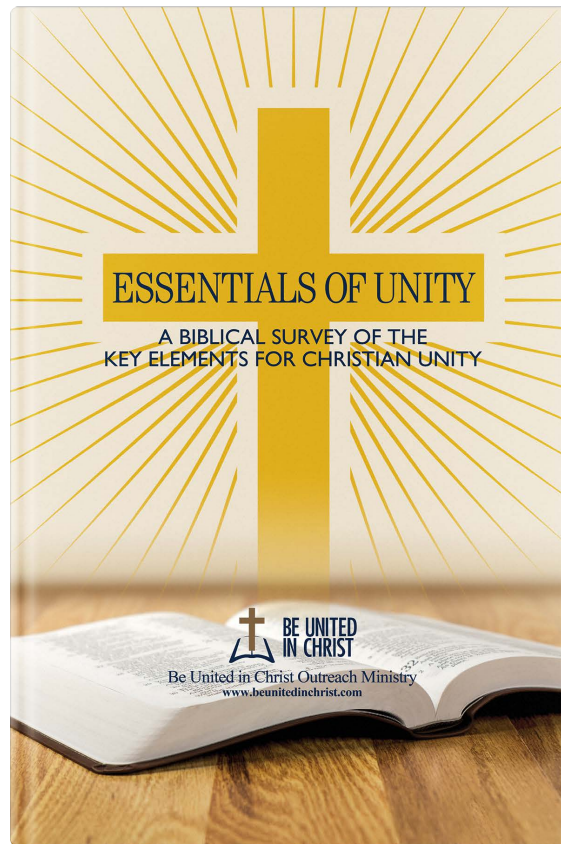
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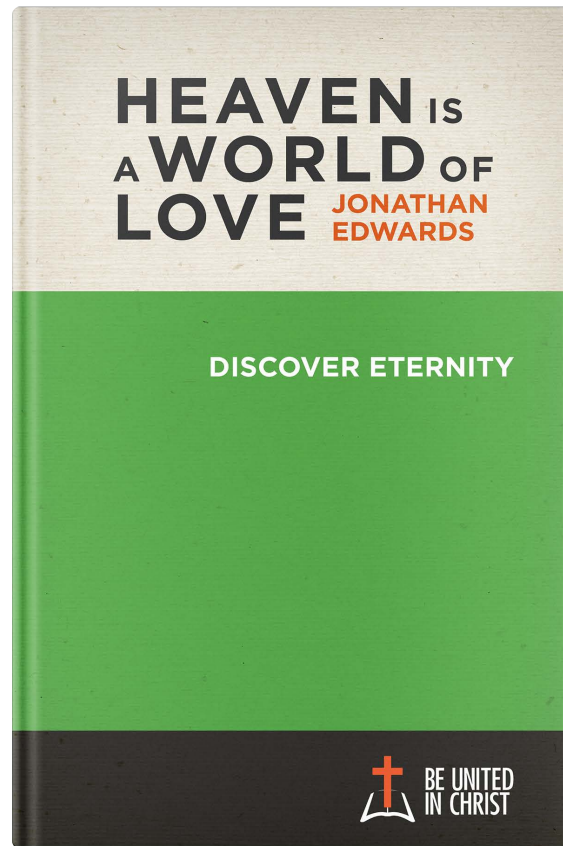
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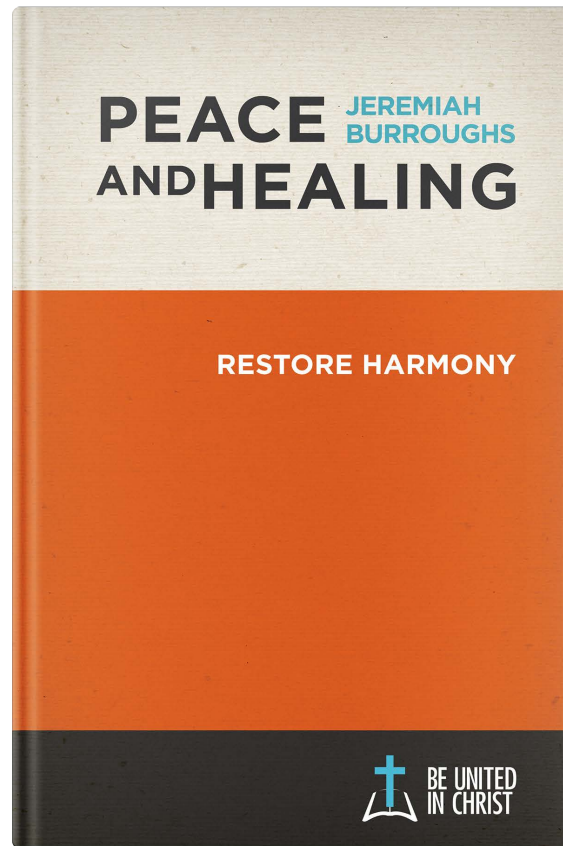
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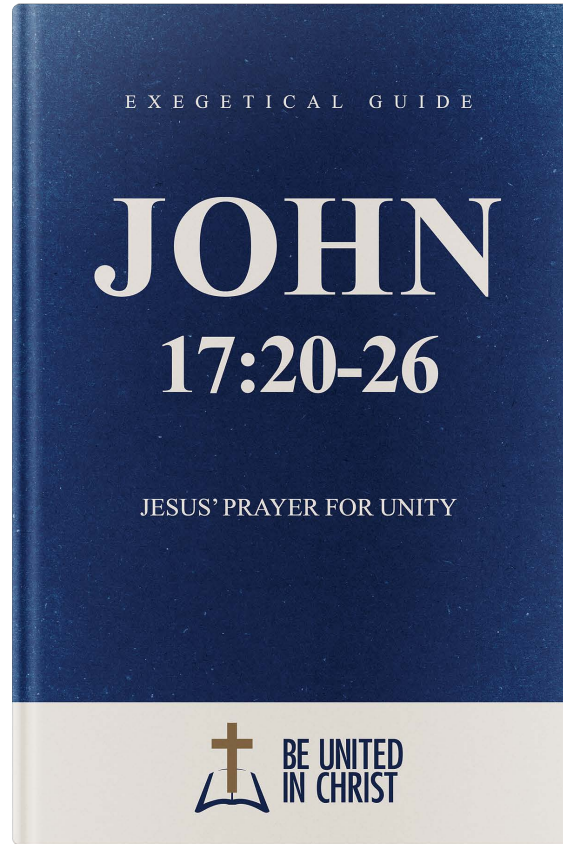


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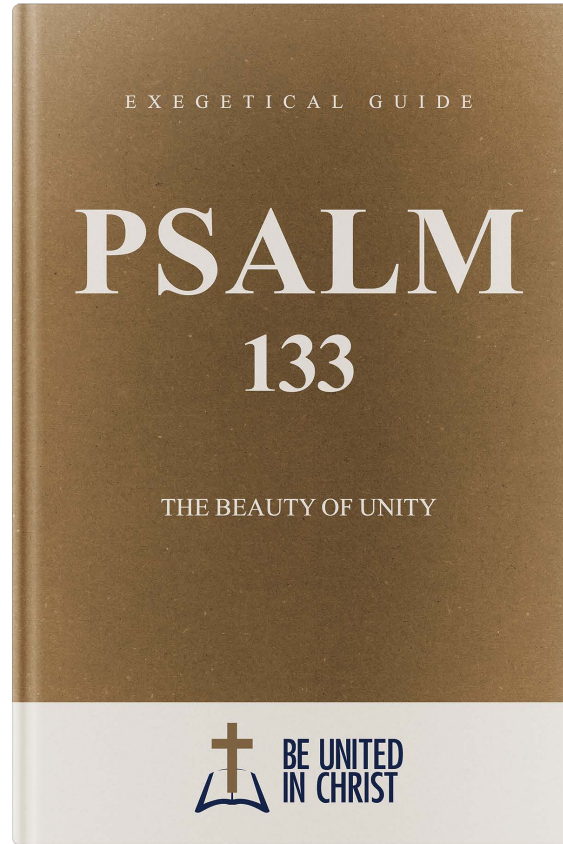
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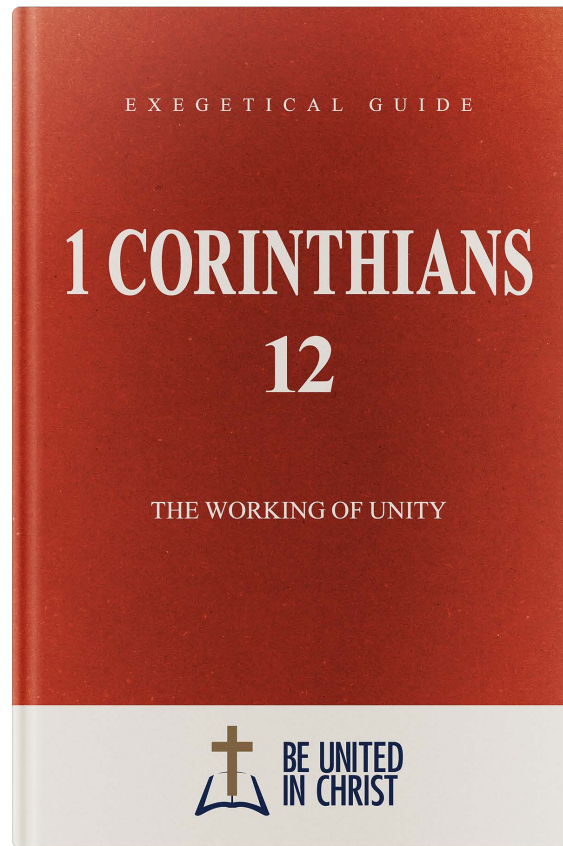
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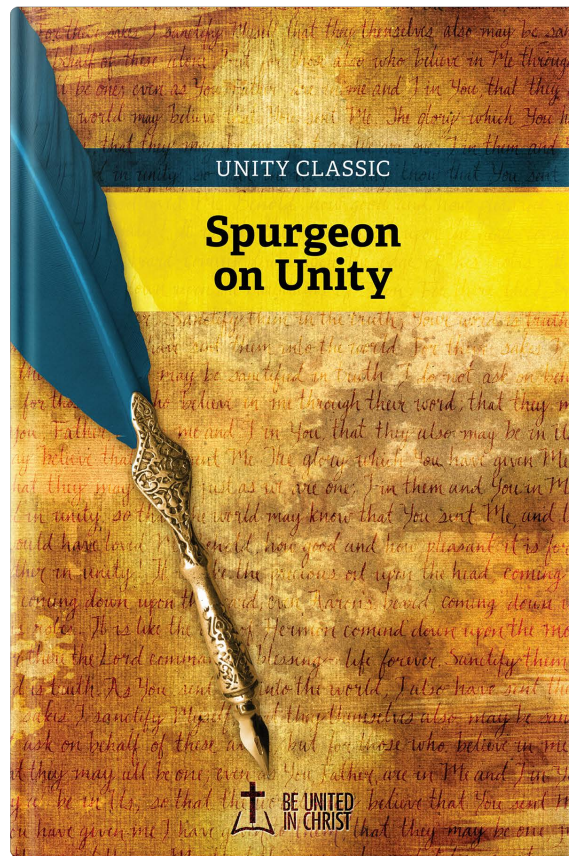
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