

Ephesians 4:1-6 Unity of the Spirit

My name is Jerry Tu; Carlin and I have attended PBCC for 30+ years, and we've loved being part of this family here. You may not know this but Carlin and I began our involvement with PBC back in Palo Alto, when I was getting my graduate degree at Stanford University. I was a new believer back then, blessed to be taught by Steve Zeisler, Ron Ritchie, and Ray Stedman. That rich, biblically-centered preaching instilled in me a love of Scripture from the very start of my Christian walk. One book I read back then impacted me greatly: Ray Stedman's Body Life; it was Ray's expository teaching of Ephesians chapter 4. In subsequent years after graduation, as we integrated into PBC Cupertino and began to serve in various roles, the principles I learned from Body Life have become so applicable. Especially as an elder at PBCC for 2 decades, I've turned to Ephesians chapter 4 to discern how God intends for His church to operate. After I retired from the board of Elders earlier this year, the pastors asked me to share with you some of the lessons I've learned as an elder. So in this short 2-sermon series, I want to review some principles we can learn from Ephesians Chapter 4 as these verses form the basis of how PBCC functions: the role of its leaders, the responsibilities of the congregation. I will cover several of PBCC's core values: the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts, Ministry of the Saints, Devotion to God's Word. This may be familiar to many of us, new to others; I feel it's important for us to revisit these foundational verses & principles so that we can grow into a healthy, mature church.

Before we begin, I'd like to give an introduction to Paul's connection to the city of Ephesus and the purpose of this letter to the believers there. Ephesus was a city in the Roman province of Asia located in what is now western Turkey, across the Aegean Sea from Athens in Greece. The city was a bustling metropolis, a center for the worship of the goddess Artemis. During his second missionary journey around 50 AD, Paul stayed in Ephesus for 2 years, preaching to Jews and Gentiles every day so that all people in that province of Asia heard the Gospel.

Nearly 10 years later, while he was under house arrest in Rome, Paul penned several letters to churches he planted: Colosse, Philippi, and Ephesus. Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus was not to correct any specific doctrinal issue, but rather to expand the horizon of Ephesian believers, open their eyes to the magnificent redemptive work of God and the glory of Christ, under whose headship the people of God were to live. The scope of God's redemption and of Jesus' glory is so expansive and magnificent that Ephesians is sometimes referred to as the "Grand Canyon" of the NT. Here is a short outline of this book:

Purpose: Headship & Glory of Christ

Chapters 1-3: Theology ("Good News")

1. Salvation by Grace through Faith
2. Unity and Peace of Christ
3. Mystery of the Gospel

Chapters 4-6: Applications ("Good Advice")

4. Church as His Body
5. Exhortation for Holy Living: Submission to one another
6. Armor of God

We will focus today on the first 6 verses of Chapter 4.

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, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

What really jumps out to you in these verses? The repetition of the number “one”. How many “one’s” do you count? Seven, the number of completeness. And among the seven “one’s” - in the beginning, middle, and end - are “One Spirit”, “One Lord”, and “One God and Father” - the Triune One God in three persons. This is one carefully constructed passage! We will take this 7-fold “oneness” or 7-fold unity as the arrow of this passage, pointing to where God intends His church to focus on: Unity of the Spirit as we read in verse 3.

Now an arrow actually consists of three parts: the arrowhead, the body of the arrow or called its shaft, and then the feathers at the end also called the fletching. This word picture of the 3-part arrow forms the structure of my sermon. The arrowhead is the 7-fold oneness or unity. The body or shaft is the community or church which follows the arrowhead. The fletching refers to the individuals which make up the body, individual attitude and conduct which guide the body towards where the arrowhead is leading.

Let me make some preliminary comments before we dive into the seven “ones”. Paul uses the term “unity” (*henotēs*) in verse 3, and also in verse 13 which we’ll cover next week. What is “Unity”?

- Unity is not “uniform”. We the church don’t need to be *uniform* - look alike, say the same things, think the same way. We as a family of God are diverse, not uniform
- Unity does not mean “union”. We don’t have to band together in institutional *union*, to become a larger organization.

Unity refers to a *relationship* - we are related to God, and through that, to one another as a family of brothers & sisters. In a relationship, being one with each other means we have a close relationship, a strong bond. Jesus refers to this relational one-ness in His prayer for his followers recorded in John 17: ²¹ *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, ... that they may be one even as we are one,* ²³ *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one.* So Unity is not uniformity or institutional union, but it’s a relational oneness, originating from God, instilled by the Spirit in our relationships.

One Body:

The church is not a gathering of individuals who happen to meet on Sundays, and who happen to agree on certain ideas. Paul uses the metaphor of a body (*soma*) for the church, we are individual organs of one body, each part is different and has a different function, yet each depends on the another. Together we form the most marvelous organism: many parts with one mutually shared life. The sharing of life is “Body Life”, from which Ray Stedman gets the title of his classic book.

One Spirit:

This is of course the Spirit of Christ whom Jesus sent to indwell in us.

- The Spirit is the great, eternal, invisible Person of the Trinity that infuses spiritual life in us.
- The same One Spirit is in every believer, in every believing church, in every time in history.
- The Spirit is the true power of God, expressed in God's church.
- Guided by and obeying that Spirit is "Life in the Spirit through Grace", one of PBCC's core values.

One Hope:

You were called to one hope that belongs to your call. Paul describes this one hope in Colossians 1:27.

Verse 27 says "*the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

As believers, we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, conforming to His character. Our hope is that somehow, someday, the transformation of our character will be complete, the glory of Christ will be displayed in us. Apostle John describes this transformation:

We know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

One Lord:

Obviously, this is Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Greek word "*kyrios*" refers to the owner, master, the one to whom a person belongs. When we proclaim "Jesus is Lord" it means He is our master; we are His bondservants. Our mission is to confess Him as **Lord** to a watching world: *so that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil 2:10-11).

One Faith:

While there are many denominations and individual churches throughout the world and throughout history, it doesn't mean there are many faiths. The one faith that unites all believers is the Saving Faith that redeemed us. It's the faith that Jesus Son of God died on our behalf, was vindicated in resurrection, and was glorified in His ascension. While there may be differences in traditions or doctrine, theological interpretations that diverge, there is this one saving faith that unites us, and that is faith in Jesus the Lord and Savior.

One Baptism:

Speaking of differing traditions or theological interpretations, what does Paul mean there is one baptism? Adult or infant? Full immersion or sprinkling? What is baptism for one church may sound all wet to another congregation. So what is Paul referring to? Paul is referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, of which water baptism is only a symbol.

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Rom 6:3-4 ⇒ Baptism is a symbol of dying with Christ and

being with Christ raised by the Father.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. 1 Cor 12:13

One Father

One Heavenly Father has adopted all of us as children. In our church, we are all brothers and sisters, a family with one Father over us all. He is the divine source of unity, of community life. His love for us is so deep, as deep as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, as deep as the Lordship of the Son, as deep as the eternal life of the Father.

Summary of the Arrowhead: Seven-fold Unity

These seven elements of “oneness” are found in authentic Christian community. If we are believers, then the Holy Spirit will bring us into agreement on these points. And agreement with one another brings us into relational unity. This is the “arrowhead” of this passage.

The Shaft of the Arrow: The Christian Community

The Christian Community is the “shaft” or “body” of the arrow - the straight, long part. The shaft gives strength and forward momentum to the arrow as it flies. In a similar way, unity in the community of believers gives the church strength to follow trajectory behind the arrowhead. What is the role of Christian community in following its arrowhead? Let’s now examine (back up to) verse 3 of Ephesians 4.

Paul says we are to be “*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*”

Paul doesn’t say we create unity or manufacture unity. We ***maintain*** the unity which the ***Spirit*** has created. We let the Holy Spirit convict individual believers in his or her heart, to align to the seven foundational “oneness” that Paul mentions. Once the Spirit has established that agreement, we have a relational unity; we are one because we hold on to these foundational aspects of unity. Then we are to eagerly *maintain* that unity. We make every effort, striving to *preserve* that unity which the Spirit has already created.

Here are a few implications of this passage for our church:

1. We don’t enforce theological or doctrinal uniformity. We may agree to disagree on non-essential elements, as long as we share in that one saving faith in Jesus Christ. In the letter to Romans, Paul describes this concept “agree to disagree”:

(let us) not quarrel over opinions. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit... So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Rom 14:1,17,19

Hence, let us not get caught up on debatable issues like politics or divisive societal issues, on the type of songs or liturgy, on leadership style or preaching format, masks or vaccinations. Let us pursue peace and mutual upbuilding.

2. Welcome diversity: our body is quite diverse; we are in life stages, maturity of Christian walk, social or economic situation, culture, ethnicity, nationality, language. We embrace the vision that John recorded in Revelation 7:

“a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9)

This side of heaven, we get a taste of that unity through the diversity we experience right here.

3. We are eager to maintain unity *in the bond of peace*. The Greek word for “bond” refers to the ligaments which tie bone to bone. The tough yet flexible connective tissue is crucial to keeping the body together. And this tough and flexible connective tissue which keeps the community together is Peace. We need to be eager to maintain and preserve peace & harmony in our community.

Clearly, maintaining peace is not an easy thing for any community, even a Christian community. As that anonymous rhyme states,

To dwell above, with saints we love, ah, that would be glory.

But to live below, with saints we know, well, that’s another story!

So how do we maintain unity in peace? That's where the individual believers come in. We now come to the "fletching" of the arrow.

The Fletching of the Arrow: The Individual Believer

The feathers or fletching help to direct the shaft, it gives the body a bit of a spin, which imparts accuracy and stability in flight. Individuals have that effect; each of us may influence the stability of the church, so we must be aware of our impact on others. What are Paul's exhortations for the individuals? We find that in verses 1 & 2 of Ephesians 4

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, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love

4. *Walk in a worthy manner*, as one who has been chosen by God, with purpose and intentionality. What is our calling from God? Let's look at what Paul says in the beginning of this letter to Ephesians:

⁴ (God) chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace... (Eph 1:4-5)

Our calling is to be blameless and holy before Him. Furthermore, the purpose of His will is for us to bring praise to Him and reflect His glory and grace. Wow, this is a sobering calling! Knowing our calling & our purpose should motivate us and guide our behavior. We should ask these questions as a litmus test when we interact with others: Are my attitude and conduct holy and blameless? Will my behavior and speech bring praise to His glorious grace? Am I walking in a manner worthy of my calling as His child?

5. *Humility, gentleness, and patience*. I don't know about you, but these three exhortations really convict me. Do these words speak to you as well? Too often I find myself *not* humble (trying to exalt myself above others, proud of my "spirituality"). Or my rash words or raised voice betray my lack of gentleness and patience. I pray that I may be conformed to the Character of Christ in me, that his gentleness, humility, and patience overcome my sinful, fleshly nature. I pray this prayer for all of us as a community that we walk with humility, gentleness, and patience with one another.
6. *Bear with one another in love*. The final exhortation is to cover everything in agape-love, selfless love, sacrificial love. Ultimately, it's agape that is the ligament, the flexible yet tough connective tissue that binds us together in spiritual unity. It all comes down to love. Love for Jesus, God, Spirit, and love for one another.

Summary

These are the points I hope we can take away and remember from the first six verses of Ephesians 4. There is a relational unity that results from agreement of a 7-fold oneness which are: one body, one Spirit, one hope. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father. This 7-fold unity is the head of the arrow.

The church or body of Christ is the shaft. We want to fly straight and true and follow the arrowhead. We are to eagerly maintain unity in the church. We do not enforce uniformity or impose union, but welcome unity in diversity, strive to preserve harmony in church in the ligament of peace.

Finally as individuals, we are the fletching of the arrow, realizing our actions and speech influence the whole body. Hence, we are to walk in a worthy manner, understanding our calling to be holy and blameless. We strive to be humble, gentle, and patient, covering one another in agape love, which binds us together.

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Rom 14:19

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor 13:13

Benediction (Adapted from Rom 15:5-6)

⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony in bond of peace with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together and in unity, you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is over all, and through all and in all, now and forever more.

e-Bulletin Contribution

In the fractured and polarized world of the last three years, one would think that the church ought to be a stabilizing and unifying force for society. However, we've seen that the church itself was just as divided and polarized as the rest of society, if not more so. We know that disunity is not God's plan for His family; He desires His children to live in harmony in the bond of love. One of the strongest exhortations for unity in the church comes from Ephesians chapter 4, a familiar passage from which PBCC derives several of our core family values. In a short 2-sermon series, we'll retrace the lessons Apostle Paul taught to the believers in Ephesus and learn how God intends for the church to unite and to function as a living body.

Scripture Reading (1 Cor 12:12-19 ESV)

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. **14** Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

15 Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. **19** If they were all one part, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

