

## Unity in the Body of Christ - Ron Stullenbarger

**Ephesians 4:1-5:** *"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* (NKJV)

Have you ever wondered why there are so many different churches? On the one hand the answer to that question is rather complicated because it involves understanding historical, geographical, theological, and doctrinal issues. But the most common reason churches divide – especially in our fellowship -- is because people cannot agree over trivial things such as methodology (the way things are done) or control (who calls the shots). When that occurs it does great damage to the cause of the Christ and the spread of the gospel.

Paul's call for unity in the body of Christ is not a call for ecumenical religion (one world religion). His call was for Jew and Gentile to worship and serve the Lord as one in Christ without promoting certain distinctions between themselves within the church. He wanted the church to avoid the divided church mentality that is so prominent today and accepted by many as the norm. Unity in the body of Christ is essential if the church is to succeed in her mission.

On the night Jesus Christ was betrayed, He prayed for the unity of His followers so that the world would believe the church's message about salvation in Him. *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me"* (John 17:20-21).

In keeping with our Lord's prayer for unity, the Apostle Paul expresses the same burden in Ephesians 4:1-3. **"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"** means we should make every effort to keep the unity among God's people. **"Endeavoring"** means *"exertion, spending yourself."* **"To keep"** means *"watch, cherish carefully as a mother would her child."* These words taken together suggest an inward effort is required to maintain the *"unity of the Spirit."*

*"Unity"* is not about how we get along on the surface but about how we are made *"one internally."* It is sharing a common life. It is how you and I are related positionally in Jesus Christ. The *"unity of the Spirit"* is the oneness we share because we are all saved by grace.

The *"bond of peace"* is that which holds believers together. For Christians, *"peace"* is not merely the absence of turmoil, but a *"bond"* that keeps turmoil from developing. The word *"bond"* is a word that refers to *"a ligament"* that holds the human body together.

God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received — the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own! This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding, and peaceful. If we live a lifestyle of self-denial and love for others, our efforts at unity within the church are more likely to be successful.