

Unity is something that is wonderful and a godly thing. Unity is something that we should seek after with all that we have. In fact, Psalm 133 describes unity in this way: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore." And so David tells us that unity is like putting oil on the head. That was a way that people greeted their guests in that day. Whenever they came in the house, they would put oil on them to refresh them. Unity, therefore, is something refreshing. It is like welcoming a guest into our home. Unity is also like dew, David says, and in that dry land dew was always something very necessary to refresh the ground, to give it the moisture that it needed. We live in North Dakota. We know how precious moisture is and how wonderful it is to have it, no matter when it comes. Unity is the same way: a precious thing that we should seek after. Because unity is part of what it means to be a Christian. We are united as one body in the Lord.

But unfortunately, Christians, unity is often so hard to find. Division and disunity seems to be far more common, because we as Christians argue over all kinds of things. Sometimes little personal faults or quibbles that we have with what someone else is doing. We are so quick to be divided and so slow to find unity in the Lord. And so we seek after a different kind of unity, something that seems like unity. Maybe we say that we'll just agree to disagree, and we'll leave it at that. But it doesn't actually resolve the problem. It doesn't resolve the issue that divides us. Or maybe we will just ignore the other person. As long as we aren't actively fighting with each other, we are united. That doesn't seem to be much of a unity either. Or a unity which simply says we should focus on the things which are important. Just ignore the things that divide us. Focus on the things that unite us, and that's all that matters. We'll just paper over our differences and say they don't actually exist. But how are any of those unity, Christians? The division is still there. Christian unity is a real unity, the unity of the Spirit, and Paul shows us what this unity looks like in our reading for today.

Paul says in verse 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." The first thing I want to point out there is that when Paul says that he urges you to walk in a manner worthy, is he's talking to you all. It is plural. It is not singular. And unity first begins by realizing that we are united, not I am united. Because so often we think in terms of I and me and my, and not in terms of we and us and ours. But when we realize that we are united as Christians, then we began to walk together as one body in the Lord. We are one group united in him. Think of it this way, Christians. It's the difference between a group which is going somewhere together and just walking down the sidewalk in town. The group which is going somewhere together is united. They're all doing the same thing. They're all going to the same place. They are moving as one. Whereas, on the other hand, if you're on the sidewalk, yeah, you might be in a group there, but you just happen to be there. You're a bunch of strangers who all happen to be in the same place at the same time, doing roughly the same thing. But you don't end up going to the same place. You have all kinds of different ideas in mind. There is no unity in that case. Christians, unity is a real unity in the Spirit. It means that we are not strangers who happen to be in the same place at the same time. We are one body in the Lord. That's the unity that we should seek after.

But Paul also calls us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling by which we have been called as Christians, which means that there is both a worthy way of walking as well as an unworthy way. And we can see the difference between the two by comparing the opposite of what Paul talks about in the next verse. He says this, verse 2: "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love." So unity is to be found in humility, in not insisting on ourselves and not insisting on our own way. Being willing to do something for someone else even when it's unpleasant for us to do so. That's what humility means. Its opposite, of course, is pride, being unwilling to stoop for someone else, insisting on our way above all. And when we have pride, Christians, when we insist on our way, how quickly disunity follows! How quickly that creates division! But when we are humble like Christ who humbled himself for us, we will find true unity in the Lord.

Unity is also to be found in gentleness. You could also translate that as meekness. In other words, not being overly concerned about yourself, not insisting on yourself, doing what someone else needs first, putting their needs above yours. That's what it means to be meek as a Christian. Its opposite is self-conceit, being stuck on yourself, thinking that you're the most important thing, being puffed up in pride. And when I'm convinced that I'm the most important thing, that my needs are what should come first above all, division quickly follows. It's inevitable. But being meek like Christ who became meek for us brings true unity in the Lord.

Unity is also to be found in patience, bearing with one another in love. Being willing to overlook the other person's faults, being willing to ignore what annoys us about them, being willing to forgive them even for the sins they have committed against us. Its opposite, of course, is impatience, not being willing to put up with anything. That person annoys me! They sinned against me! I don't like them! Whatever it may be. That's what it means to be impatient. And how quickly that causes division! But being patient like Christ leads to true unity in the Lord. So in these ways, Christians, through all of these examples, we can see what it means to walk in a worthy way and also in an unworthy way of the calling we have as Christians.

But in the following verse, Paul gives a very colorful picture of what this unity looks like. He says in verse 3: "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Focus on that word "bond." Bond literally means something used to tie something else together, like a rope used to tie two things together. Or tie-down that you use to hold something into place. Or a cord which bundles a whole bunch of things together. That's what is meant by the word "bond." So the bond of peace, then, is literally being tied together in the Lord, tied together in the same Spirit. And when we are tied together to each other, Christians, you can't just ignore all of the differences that we have. We just can't ignore our problems. When we are tied together, we can't agree to disagree. When we are tied together, we can't say that our differences are unimportant. When we are tied together, we can't just ignore our problems. We are tied together in Jesus, bundled into one in the Lord.

And more than this, not only are we tied together, but we should seek to be tied together. We should seek to be bound even more closer to each other each and every day, to have a real unity in the Lord, to work hard to be one in God. Because that's who we are as Christians. That is who we have been called to be: tied together into one body in the Holy Spirit.

Because listen to how many times Paul says the word "one" in the last three verses of our reading: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." And if all of these things are one, Christians, if we all share the same things in the Lord, then we too should be one. Because there is one body, not two. Our congregation is not made up of lots of different little bodies, but we are one body in Jesus Christ our Lord. There is one Spirit, not two. We have the same Holy Spirit. It's not like I have one Spirit and you have a different one. We all have the same in the Lord. There is one hope, not two. We all look forward to the same thing, the same salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. One Lord, not two. One faith, not two. One baptism, not two. There is one God, one Father, the same Father who calls us all into the same faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And so if we are one in all of these things, Christians, why would we settle for a fake unity? Why would we say that it's enough to disagree with each other, when we are one in God? Why would we say that we are united as long as we are not fighting with one another, when we are one body in Jesus Christ our Lord? Why would we pretend that our differences don't exist, when we are one in the Holy Spirit? We have been united in all of these things, Christians. We must not seek after a fake unity, but rather the real unity of the Spirit. Being eager to resolve our differences by seeking the truth above all things. That is the unity which God gives us. That is the real unity of the Spirit.

And so what does this mean for us? It means I want you to think about that one person in the congregation. You know the one I'm talking about. The one you can't get along with, the one you don't want anything to do with, the one you just try to ignore. Pray for them by name to the Lord. Ask him to bless them and to care for them. And then go to them, forgive them, and work to resolve your differences, because you are one in the Lord. Be willing and even eager to be tied together with that person, to be bound with the bond of peace. And then, bound together in God, walk together with them towards the Lord as Christians. Not as strangers, but as brothers in the Lord. That is real Christian unity. That is what we should seek after in the Lord: the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. May we seek after that unity with all that we have by the grace of God!

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have united us together into one body in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us always to be forgiving towards one another, to be eager to seek after being bound with each other, that we may glorify you in all that we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.