

We have watched for 12 years with hushed admiration the way people in uniform have faced danger and death in Afghanistan and Iraq and the way their families have borne the death and damage done to people they love. They often express their courage in a single purpose: “We were defending our freedom.”

Any clear purpose, embraced with conviction, enables people to bear uncertainty, danger, and loss, and it enables them to achieve undreamed of results. If our lives don't serve some large purpose, we won't achieve much, and the inevitable, unexpected setbacks in life will overwhelm us.

Ephesians 4 opens with a clear purpose and a clear call to embrace that purpose. **As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** The clear purpose is **the calling you have received.** That takes us back to Ephesians 2:22: In Christ the whole Church is **being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** The Church is God's dwelling place on earth. “The flesh of the *Church* is the abode of the divine presence in the world. It is the carnal anchor that God has sunk into the soil of creation.” (Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith*, 256) That's you. You are the flesh in which God lives in this world. That's the Church's calling. That is our calling. That is our clear purpose.

The challenge to embrace that calling is equally clear: **live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** A life worthy of our calling revolves around three governing ideas in Ephesians 4-6: the unity of the Church, the new attitude and lifestyle of the Church, and the spiritual warfare of the Church. Many of you at Communion last Sunday made a promise to Christ that you will do all in your power this fall to remember the Church's calling and to learn and live out those three governing ideas. Let's get started.

Maintaining Unity of the Spirit

There is a word in verse 1 that troubles some of us. **I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** Many, maybe most, of us instinctively shrink from saying we could be worthy. It sounds like boasting. Worse, it sounds like we are earning God's favor. We run like a scared rabbit from giving the impression that we think we are worthy or that we are better than anyone else.

That's good. I'm glad you feel that way. Never forget it. But now, we need to get past it. The Apostle Paul was realistic about the barely converted heathen he was writing to, but it didn't stop him from telling them **to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.** He thought it was possible for imperfect, unworthy people to pursue that with integrity. It won't be easy. There will be failures. But who are we to disagree with an apostle of the Church, and he has given us expert guidance in what such a life looks like.

His guidance begins with the first governing idea of Ephesians 4-6. Verse 3: **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** Let's get some understanding around what we've just learned.

The unity of the Spirit means the unity, which the Holy Spirit gives to the Church. The unity of the Church is a given, like the color of your eyes or your fingerprint. Paul described that unity in verses 4-6. **There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** We had better take a closer look at our spiritual DNA.

There is one body. There was not to be a Jewish Church and a Gentile Church. There was to be one Church, one body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13) There is not a black church and a white church and a Korean church, etc. Red and yellow, black and white, Christians are all **members together of one body**. God sees one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, displayed in all its ethnic splendor. Here's what makes it one Church.

There is one Holy Spirit. The apostle said it best in 1 Corinthians 12:13: **we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.** The Holy Spirit in BVBC is not different from the Holy Spirit down at St. Mary Magdalene or the Holy Spirit over at first Assembly of God. The life of God is in us all.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one Lord. Christians understand Jesus differently, sometimes with disastrous consequences. But there is only one Jesus who is the Lord of the church. It seems silly to say that there is **one faith**. Nothing divides Christians more than doctrine. Yes, and nothing unites Christians like doctrine. The divisions over doctrine are real. Nobody can deny them. What is easy to miss is how much common doctrinal and devotional ground all Christian denominations share. The common ground is what C. S. Lewis and Richard Baxter, the Puritan preacher, called “mere Christianity.” It crosses all denominational, ethnic, and national boundaries. It finds timeless expression in the Apostles' Creed. Don't miss its unifying power.

Finally, it seems like a joke to say there is **one baptism**. BVBC is the biggest offender, isn't it? You can get into heaven if you have been sprinkled, but you cannot become a member of Brandywine Valley Baptist Church unless you have been immersed. Different churches immerse, pour, and sprinkle. Some baptize one time backwards, and others three times forward. Some baptize children, and others baptize only adults. It doesn't look like one baptism.

I'll tell you why there is one baptism. Christian churches are unified by baptism in that nearly all do it in obedience to Christ's command, and nearly all do it in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The different ways we understand and do it do not cancel out what we do. There is **one baptism** throughout the wide world.

Finally, **there is one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.** And on this point there is great agreement. These realities constitute the unity of the Church, which the Spirit has brought into existence. We are to lead lives worthy of this unity. How do we do that? Back to verse 3: We maintain that unity in **the bond of peace**. Let's talk about **the bond of peace**.

The Bond of Peace

I have to start with something you might not want to hear. The apostle was not talking about personal peace. He was talking about peace in the community, in the Church. Nearly all New Testament references to peace refer to the peace of the Church or the community, not to an individual's peace of mind.

Let me show you why. Look back at Ephesians 2:14-15: **Christ is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.** He was not talking about peace of mind. He was talking about a breakthrough in the age-old conflict between Jews and non-Jews, whom we call Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles were oil and water; they were apples and oranges. Many Gentiles despised Jews,

and many Jews returned the favor. The apostle said that Christ brought them together. They couldn't agree on the time of day, but they agreed on Christ.

Something unprecedented happened in synagogues and house churches. Little bands of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus met together to worship Him. Their uneasy unity anticipated the day when God will **bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ**. That's when the world will be at peace.

The apostle wasn't thinking about your peace of mind. He was thinking about the order and serenity of the community of believers. Christians disagree about doctrine and morals and the music and the color of paint on the walls. We not only disagree; we can be disagreeable. We get angry and petty. We take offense where no offense was intended. Such behavior can unravel the **bond of peace** fast. How do we maintain it?

Humble, Gentle, Patient

Verse 2: **Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.** Are you humble? It's a trick question. If you say, "No," someone will get on your case to be humble. If you say, "Yes," you run the risk of being arrogant. Could we put that aside? It's clever, and it doesn't help. Here's what humble means in the New Testament.

Being humble is doing what it takes to serve and make sacrifices that strengthen the bond of peace in the Church. If what it takes is giving in or holding your tongue or deferring your rights or waiting till a better time to bring a subject up, humility will do that for the sake of the peace of the Church. It takes a strong person to be humble.

Jesus is the greatest example of humility! Even though he was **in very nature God** (that is strength, isn't it!), He **did not consider equality with God something to be grasped**. So, what did He do? He **made himself nothing** – nothing in comparison with being God – **taking the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness**. And that wasn't all! **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself** (again). And what did He do this time? **He humbled himself and became obedient unto death – even death on a cross.** (Philippians 2:6-8) You have to be strong to give that kind of obedience.

Modern ideas of humility focus on personality. Biblical ideas of humility focus on action. Biblical humility does what it takes to serve and make sacrifices to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Humility is like peace. It's not about you. It's about the Church and what you can do to maintain its unity in the bond of peace.

The same ideas apply to the second virtue in verse 2: **gentle**. The first comment on this word is Matthew 11:29. Jesus said, **"I am gentle and humble."** There are our two words from Ephesians 4. Jesus was gentle in that He could be imposed on. A desperate mother could interrupt His vacation. A desperate father could persuade Him to stop what He was doing and come to his sick daughter's side. Hungry disciples persuaded Him that it was okay to break bureaucratic, Sabbath laws. The agenda of His gentleness was people and their needs. That same agenda will **maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** by meeting the needs of those who are angry or confused.

Humility and gentleness are joined by patience to keep the peace. The apostle gave his own definition of patience at the end of verse 2: patience means **bearing with one another in love**. You work with people who seem determine to be a pain in the neck.

Can you keep your voice down? Can you remember the order and peace of the Church?
Can you remember the example of Christ?

Take Aways

Robert Ricci had an experience that captures the spirit of the apostle's words. "I was wrapping up the day when all of a sudden came the sound of squealing tires and gravel being thrown all over the place outside, pelting our building and vehicles. I turned to see a thick cloud of dust building and a silver pickup inside it doing circle after circle in the gravel lot. Oh no, my Tahoe! The work van! What's happening? and ran toward it. By the time I got there he was gone in a fury.

"All the vehicles were covered in dust and debris, my Black Tahoe, peppered with gravel and stones, then came the motorcycle guys running from their shop, fuming mad. Their bay door was wide open. They and their bikes were pelted with rocks and stones. You don't ever want to mess with these guys. Ever. They're furiously shouting as the truck speeds away, 'STOP! Expletive! Get back here! Expletive!'

"Aaron, the owner, immediately heads for his truck to give chase and that is when the peace of Christ pours out, completely unexpected.

"No, Aaron, please don't do that, it only leads to worse, please stay here," I say, as his 14 year old son looks on. Then: 'I think it was one of the guys from the fence company, let's go over there and see.' Well, no sooner do we get there, the guy returns to the scene, gets out of his truck and as we approach says, 'What's going on?' 'You sprayed us with stones!' shouts a motorcycle guy. 'You sprayed gravel all over the shop! We have freshly painted bikes in there!' says another. 'You sprayed my Tahoe and van.' Well, they really want to hurt this guy, bad, really bad.

"I gently turn to him and say, 'Do you have any idea what you have done here?' As he looks around his defensive posture begins to change, he swallows deep, 'I've had a really bad day man, I wasn't thinking, what can I do?' and I say, 'well, we could start with some insurance info, but before we do that let's have a look.' So we all looked around and ended up beside the Tahoe, chipped paint and all.

"Now, you could tell he was genuinely remorseful and really surprised by the results. He might make 10 bucks an hour at the fence company. He's likely living paycheck to paycheck and this is gonna set him back more than he can handle. So I ask, 'What are you gonna do about all this?' He looks me in the eye and says, "Whatever it takes." This guy appears to be really hurting here.

"After a very long pause I turn to him, then to the guys, to the Tahoe, back to him and say, 'Look, that's not how we roll around here, we look out for each other, we respect each others' property', and as I am saying this he looks down, 'I'm really sorry for all this, man, I'll do whatever it takes to make it right.'" and after a bit I say, 'Well, that's good enough for me.' He looks at me, 'What?'

"I turn to the guys, 'Guys?'... 'Nothing we can't fix.' I turn to him and ask, 'What is your name?' "John.' I extend my hand and as we are shaking hands, I say 'Peace to you, John.' He looks up bewildered, and I say, 'We're all good here.' Then I turned and walked away.

"John stopped by my office the next morning to see if everything was ok and express his gratitude. I thanked him for that, and if there was anything he ever needed, just stop by.

"This could have easily spiraled out of control, and evil would have won again. This could not have been accomplished, without, the Spirit of God residing in me. The same Spirit, who resides in all who believe in the love, sacrifice and resurrection of his son, Jesus.

"Let's get our pride and ego out of the way and instead make room for the Holy Spirit who transforms hearts and minds. He won't do it without us, and we can't do it without Him, now, more than ever."

If it can happen when gravel and dust are pockmarking your truck and coating the fresh paint of motorcycles, it can take place in congregational meetings and committee meetings and marriages and with Christians who seem as different from us as Martians.

We are the flesh in which God lives in this world. Let's live worthy of that calling by maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with humility, gentleness, and patience with those who provoke us.