Keep the Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-16

Key Verse: 4:3 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Last Wednesday on the way to Seattle for the staff conference, I had a chance to talk with a young man who sat by me in a plane. After he realized that I am a minister, he asked a question about his relationship with his girlfriend. He wanted my opinion on inter-faith marriage because he is a Catholic and his girlfriend is a Jew. He confronted a strong opposition from his Catholic parents as she did the same from her Jewish parents. I answered my opinion based on 1 Corinthians 7. While talking with him, I realized that unity is a common issue in a person, in a family, in the church, in the community, in a country, and in the world. I thanked God that he had given me a chance to share the gospel with him during my trip.

There was a unity problem in the Ephesian church. The Ephesian church consisted of the Jewish believers and the gentile believers. There were visible and invisible tensions and conflicts between these two groups. In today’s passage Paul, as their shepherd, teaches them the true meaning of unity and its purpose for God’s kingdom and mature Christian life.

First, live a life worthy of the calling. Look at verse 1. “***As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received***.” Paul urged the saints in the church to live a life worthy of the calling. What does it mean “to live a life worthy of the calling”? How can we live a life worthy of the calling? Paul urged them to remember God’s grace for their salvation. He reminded them of what kind of sinners they were and how God showed his grace to them when they lived in darkness. In the previous chapters 1-3 Paul helped them, especially the gentile believers, to remember their spiritual blessings when they became Christians. They became adopted children along with the Jews, heirs of God, sharers of God’s promise, and so on. In the past they were enemies of God, objects of God’s wrath, and children of darkness. But now only by God’s grace and through faith in Jesus Christ, they were saved and called to be children of God.

God wants all of us to live a life worthy of the calling we received. Are you living a life worthy of the calling? In order to live a life worthy of the calling, we must remember God’s grace upon our lives. Remembering God’s love and grace and appreciating them is the beginning point to living a life worthy of the calling.

In verses 2-5 Paul teaches us how to live a life worthy of the calling practically. Look at verse 2. “***Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.***” In the Ephesian church there was hostility among the believers. (2:14,16) They didn’t accept each other when they found some differences among themselves. Out of pride, jealousy, and self-righteousness, they hated each other. So, Paul urged them to be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another. It was not easy for them to be completely humble and gentle. It is not easy for us, too. We can become partially humble to a certain degree, not completely. How can we become completely humble and gentle? It is possible when we learn from Jesus. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*.” Someone said that humility is thinking of myself less. But true humility is making myself nothing. Christ Jesus, even though he is God in nature, did not consider himself equal with God, but made himself nothing and became a man. Jesus is God, but he humbled himself and appeared as a man. Becoming humble and gentle leads us to participate in the divine nature of Christ.

Paul told them to be patient and bear one another in love. Patience is endurance, waiting in expectation. Patience is expectation that God will work for good in all situations. We are impatient. We easily blow up when things do not go as we expected. We expect immediate results and instant outcomes. But, we need to wait until God works for good according to his good purpose in his good time. Patience is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. With patience, we must bear with one another in love.

Paul said in verse 3. “***Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace***.” Making unity does come not naturally. We must make every effort to make peace. As freedom is not free, so making peace also requires effort. Reconciliation in particular needs mutual effort. How can proud sinners like us keep the unity of the Spirit? It seems impossible to keep unity among proud sinners. But, it is possible when we learn from Jesus. Paul told them to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Jesus Christ is peace. 2:14 says, “*For he himself is our peace*.” Jesus Christ destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility and made peace between God and sinners. Christ brought peace to this world through his death on the cross. Romans 5:1 says that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace with God when our sins are forgiven and when we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

We have peace with God when we repent. When we deny ourselves and obey God’s will, we have peace. We also have peace with God when we keep spiritual order in our family and in the church. When we break this spiritual order which God established, we lose peace. In chapter 5:23 Paul said that Christ is the head of the church. We are parts of this body which is the church. We are not the head, but parts of the church. When we obey this order in the church, we have peace with God and our church will become a healthy church. In the same way we have peace with God when we keep this spiritual order in a family. Husband is the head of his wife. Paul said in 5:23, “*For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, which he is the Savior*.” When a wife respects her husband and a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, the family have peace with God and the church will become healthy and strong community.

In verses 4-6 Paul urges them to serve the Lord with one heart and mind. Look at 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***.” God the Father whom we believe is the One God whom we worship. Jesus Christ who saved us is the only one whom we all believe as the Lord and Savior. The Spirit who leads us and guides us into the truth is the Holy Spirit. These three persons have one essence, not three. We call this the Holy Trinity or the Triune. These three persons works together as one. They work together for one goal and one purpose, for “His Kingdom”. In Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the Lord said, “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*.” Here, the word ‘with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our strength’ means with ‘with undivided heart. The Lord is one, not two or three. Therefore, even though we have many different ideas, different opinions, different characters, and different preference, we must serve the Lord with one heart, one Spirit, one faith, and for one goal. Amen.

A church is an organism like the human body. Christ is the head of the church and we are his parts. Jesus Christ gave gifts to each person. Jesus apportioned unique roles and functions to each part of the body. No part is superior to others or better than others. Each part has its own unique function and They have equal value. Paul said in verse 11 that Christ himself gave different gifts to his people; some as the apostles, others as the prophets, and still others as the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers. It is the same among us that some serve the Lord as messengers, others as music servants, and still others teachers or treasurers, and so on. We have different roles and different positions, but each of us has equal value and relevance.

What is the purpose of the unity and why is making unity in one body important? It is to build up the body of Christ, which is the church. Look at verses 12-13. “***to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***” All parts of the body work together in order to build up the body. All parts of the church work together for one goal through the head, Jesus Christ. In verse 16 Paul said, “***From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***” The Christ Church is a big organism, which all parts work together in order. We Christians all work together as parts of the church in order to build up the body of Christ. We the St. Louis UBF church all work together as a part of Christ’s churches in order to establish God’s kingdom. We have many differences in race, in culture, in age, in gifts, and in character, but we all have one goal. We are praying for the coming ISBC 2018. The title of the conference is “His Kingdom.” For this one goal and one purpose we all become united and work together. We must work hard and pray sincerely that God’s kingdom may come into the hearts of young people through this conference. While studying this passage at the staff conference, I found that I was wrong in three matters before God, especially in keeping the unity of the Spirit. First, I did not make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Second, I did not work hard for “His Kingdom.”, but for my kingdom, my security. Third, I am not the head of the church, but a part of Christ’s body. While writing testimonies based on this passage, I asked God’s forgiveness and his mercy. I made some effort to keep the unity, but did not make every effort. I pray that I may work hard for the unity in our ministry. I also must work hard for ‘His Kingdom’, not ‘my kingdom’ as a part of the church, not as a head of the church. Amen.

Paul urged the believers in the Ephesian Church to grow spiritually. He did not want them to remain as spiritual infants. He wanted them to grow as mature spiritual servants. Spiritual infants are those who are tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the deceitful scheming. (4:14) Mature servants of Christ are those who speak truth in love. (4:15) Above all, mature servants are those who live a life worthy of the calling. They are humble and gentle, and they know how to consider others better than themselves. They are ready to deny themselves for God’ Kingdom. I pray that we all may grow as mature servants of God who work together for His Kingdom. Amen.