

The Power of God & Community

Ephesians 4:4-6

Most of you know that Calvin & Hobbes is my favorite comic strip. I like the one where Calvin is in the dark, lying in bed yelling “Mom!” The mom gets out of bed and comes into the room looking exhausted and less than pleased. Calvin cheerfully asks her, “How do ugly things like bugs and octopuses reproduce? Are they really attracted to each other?” The next frame shows her chewing out Calvin for getting her up in the middle of the night for an inane question like that. As she goes off, Calvin comments to Hobbes on her bad mood saying, “Come to think of it, how are humans attracted to each other?” Hobbes in obvious agreement says, “Maybe that’s why they close their eyes when they smooch.”

How are Christian humans attracted to each other? There are two or three answers out there that are vying for your attention. I want to convince you that it is the power of God, and the power of God alone. When you look at the New Testament writings, it becomes quite clear that natural answers are not sufficient. There are natural things that do attract us to each other. There is the “need-driven support groups” answer. There are the sociological and psychological answers. But in this book the people were not attracted to each other because of similar backgrounds, or common pains and struggles, or similar interests. Those can certainly be beneficial. But when you look at the kind of community that Paul describes in this book you find incompatible people living compatibly together. It’s enough to make a Calvin and Hobbes in the world sit up and scratch their heads in puzzlement. In this book you have Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, old and young. You find new Christians and mature Christians mutually serving each other. You find rich and poor Christians on an equal footing. True Christian community is so different from the kind of community that the world counterfeits that Jesus says it will be the distinctive that makes the world sit up and take notice. Jesus said, **By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another...** Why? Because it’s not something that can be produced apart from God’s grace. And so today we are going to be looking at the power of God and community.

1 Corinthians 1 tells us that Paul was attracted to the Corinthians. But he was not attracted to them because they were such nice people, or even because they treated him nicely. If you read 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 you will find that they treated him rather poorly. Of all the churches, they were perhaps the most messed up, yet Paul could say in 1 Corinthians 1:4, **I**

thank my God always concerning you ... I can think of some people like those in Corinth which I would have a hard time thanking God always for, unless His power had changed my sinful attitudes and brought me into community with them. In 2 Cor. 12:15 he spoke of how deeply he loved the Corinthians. He longed for them. And if there was a Calvin and Hobbes looking on at Paul's attraction to the Corinthians, they might have been scratching their heads. Yet Paul indicates that though there were problems, there was genuine community happening at Corinth. And Paul does the same in this chapter. He indicates later that there are moral problems in Ephesus. He indicates in this chapter that there were people who were being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. Yet, they have a community in Christ, which he is calling them to enjoy more and more. – The power of God in community.

Now let's just review where we have been so far. Unfortunately, denominations have become totally insulated from each other. In chapters 1-3 Paul lays the theological foundations for true community. In chapter 4:1-3 he calls upon the Ephesians to adjust their attitudes to line up with that doctrine. And in verses 4-6 He describes the nature of this community. And he does all of that before he gets into the activities of community in verses 7-16. You see, it is only as we know the doctrine of community and experience the power of God that those activities in verses 7-16 are meaningful and effective.

Today I want to look briefly at the role that Father, Son and Holy Spirit play in our community. Notice the seven one's mentioned in these verses: Verse 4 gives three ones tied to the Spirit, verse 5 gives three one's that are tied to the Son and verse 6 gives a one tied to the Father. **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.** If we are already made one by Father, Son and Holy Spirit, why does verse 3 say that we are responsible? Verse 3 says, *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* But notice even in verse 3 that we don't produce the unity, we merely keep it. God first works the unity and we can hinder it or keep it by His power, but we can't produce it. So we shouldn't play divine sovereignty against human responsibility. Both are true.

I. Wrought by the Ministry of the One Spirit (v. 4)

A. If the Spirit is not divided, then His work is not divided

For example (and let's move into Roman numeral I), when Paul says **There is one body**, he is not denying that Christians make divisions. They do. He wrote the Corinthians **I hear that there are divisions among you**, *but* in the same epistle Paul says, **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...** The Spirit has made one body and men make divisions – they try to make multiple bodies. There is a spiritual union that we have with members of the kingdom whether they are in Sudan or here, and no matter how many sinful divisions we may experience, it will never totally destroy the reality that the Spirit has already produced one and only one body.

Now that ought to affect how we treat other denominations. Back in the 1600's, one of the Puritan writers at the Westminster Assembly, by the name of Jeremiah Burroughs, gave a treatise on how denominationalism can actually promote unity rather than division. The very word is an ecumenical word because it means that we are not the one and only church but a denomination within the true church. Denomination is an ecumenical word. So the word denomination makes us think more broadly than ourselves. But denominationalism also preserves our efforts to grow in the truth as we are commanded to do in verses 13-15. In verse 5 we will see that Jesus has already given the faith – the body of beliefs which covers, as Peter says, **“all things that pertain to life and godliness.”** He's already given it all in Scripture. But look at verses 13-15. The Ephesians hadn't arrived yet. They were waiting and praying **till we all come to the unity of the faith...** Verse 14 indicates that there were doctrinal errors in the church and would be for some time to come. It says, **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine...** To preserve doctrinal integrity, there is sometimes need for denominations. But we must all be ready to affirm the apostles creed that there is only one, holy, catholic apostolic church. It is wrought by the Spirit already, and we are praying and working to more and more true, not false, unity in that body.

But the word “body” itself is interesting. He doesn't say there is one organization. The world council of churches appeals to this verse to indicate that we ought to have one organization to which all are committed. No. That's not what it says. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown say, “There is not added, ‘One Pope, one council, one form of government.’” It is not an organization, but a living, life giving body that He likens the church to.

Nor is the body broader than the true church. I received an invitation from Countryside Community Church last week to come to a meditation/prayer circle for peace. They were calling for Christians to stand together with practitioners of Centering Prayer, Transcendental, Yogic and Buddhist meditation claiming that this unity is essential in our era of global disintegration. The invitation said, “much of the body of humankind is aching to stand in solidarity...” Much of the body of humankind?! What kind of body is Paul speaking of? He knows nothing of the body of humankind. He has already defined his terms in Ephesians 1:22-23 where he speaks of “**the church, which is His body**. All over America there is a movement to distort and redefine the terms of community and unity given in this chapter. The Emergent Church Movement is making the lines of distinction between religions *very* fuzzy and implying that all either are or will be part of the body. But the Spirit defines true community in this verse. There is only one body that the Spirit indwells and that one body has a calling.

B. There is only one body that the Spirit unites every believer to

He says, **just as you were called in one hope of your calling**. This is not talking about the outward calling of preaching which is many times ignored. When referring to the outward call of the Gospel Christ says **Many are called but few are chosen**. But when Scripture speaks of the inward call of the Spirit summoning our lives from the dead, we always come as surely as Lazarus came forth when Christ called him. Romans 8:29-30 indicates that all whom God predestined to life He called, and all whom He called He justified, and all whom He justified He will glorify. People speak of that as the unbreakable golden chain of salvation. So everybody called by the Spirit is saved. 1 Peter 2:9 says that God **called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**. Two brothers can listen to the same evangelist preaching the Gospel, and for one it will be a boring message with no impact upon him (because all he hears is the outward call) while the other brother will find his heart informed and warmed and drawn to God because the Spirit has called him inwardly through that Word. And we can't explain the difference humanly. Even within the church there are people who answer the outward call of the Gospel but who are not saved. They may be in the church outwardly, but they are not truly in the body. 1 John says of some who apostatized that they were not truly of us in the first place. This powerful

work of the Spirit, which draws us away from our sinful impulses and into fellowship with each other, has never been performed upon their hearts.

On the other hand, there may be a person who is resistant to true Biblical community, but if God's call is upon his life, his resistance will be broken down. He will not be able to consistently maintain this break in fellowship with God's people. There is a unifying power in the Spirit's call. I remember reading about the first missionaries to New Zealand and the church that was established there among the headhunters. P. J. Maclagen relates this story. He said,

In New Zealand the Lord's Supper was being celebrated. The first rank having knelt, a native rose up and returned to his seat, but again returned to the rank and knelt down. Being questioned, he said, "When I went to the table I did not know whom I should have to kneel beside, when suddenly I saw by my side the man who a few years before slew my father and drank his blood, and whom I then devoted to death. Imagine what I felt when I suddenly found him by my side. A rush of feeling came over me that I could not endure, and I went back to my seat. But when I got there, I saw the Upper Sanctuary and the Great Supper and I thought I heard a voice saying, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another.'" That overpowered me. I sat down, and at once seemed to see another vision of a cross with a Man nailed to it; and I heard him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then I returned to the altar.

This man was attracted to fellowship with his former enemy not from anything human, but from the work of God's Spirit through the Word. And His calling of us unto His kingdom continues to draw our hearts away from that which is destructive to community. We just finished reading Don Richardson's book, *Peace Child*, and saw an example of a man momentarily overcome with a desire to kill the man who had taken and eaten his baby years before. He was overwhelmed with a desire for revenge until he felt the call of God's Spirit making him recognize that this man was part of this one body. He was overcome by that call to forgiveness. You see, the calling does not stop with conversion. It is a calling that the Spirit produces upon us throughout our lives which draws us into His purposes for us.

C. The Spirit gives the same calling and produces the same hope in every believer

Let me quickly quote some Scriptures that show how this call of the Spirit produces community. First, the Spirit's call is the answer to isolationism because Scripture says **you were called in one body. you were**

called into the fellowship of His Son (1 Cor. 1:9). This means that if you are truly saved, you have been saved into the body and into fellowship.

It is the answer to elitism because 1 Corinthians 1:26 says, **For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called...** He didn't say, "not any," but "not many." And God's purpose was to destroy elitism within the assembly.

The Spirit's calling is the answer to racism since Romans 9:23 says that we all deserved damnation, but God in His mercy saved us, **whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles...** (Rom. 9:24).

It is the answer to discord because 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, **God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.** We were called into fellowship. That was the first impulse of the Spirit's moving upon our heart. And if you have no longings for such fellowship it may be an indication that you have answered an outward call but have not had the Spirit of God powerfully and effectually calling you into true fellowship. And if that's the case, it doesn't matter how much we change things outwardly to promote community, you're not going to be interested.

The Spirit's calling is the answer to age divisions since Acts 2:39 says, **the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.**"

It is the answer to the unfaithfulness of Christians because God promises in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 is, **He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it...** He called you and He will do it because He is faithful. His faithfulness answers our own unfaithfulness to the calling. If we have not experienced His calling there is no point in even trying to engage in the community building activities that we will begin to look at next week.

But having said all of that, it is still important to state that the Spirit does not bypass our efforts. The phrase says, **you were called in one hope of your calling...** It is not something *immediately* accomplished or there would be no need for hope. Hope implies we haven't arrived yet. It militates against perfectionist expectations, but it also shows that we have to take verse 3 seriously. The Spirit accomplishes all the dimensions of this call over time because the Spirit wants our involvement, or what verse three says our endeavors – **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** The Spirit gives the desire, the expectation, and the hope that drives us to the endeavor of community. He places within us a longing for deeper community.

Now let's think about that hope and that longing for a moment. Proverbs 13:12 says, **hope deferred makes the heart sick...** Hope can be a

great motivator, but when it is deferred too long, it can make us feel like giving up. I think that every Christian has hope for community placed within him. But when our hope is too idealistic and does not take into account all the defects that Paul says are going to be in the church, then we will never be satisfied. I think this is one of the reasons why some people hop from church to church. I know one person who has probably hopped to over 50 churches in the same city. He will spend a few months in one and become dissatisfied and sometimes even angry. What has been going on is that this man has an unrealistic hope that is constantly been deferred. This is why it is important for us to go through the *doctrine* of community before we look at the *how* to of communion. We need to make sure that what we are aiming at (our hope) is Biblical. The hope that the Spirit gives requires patience and work. It is not unrealistic. As Paul says in Galatians 6:9, **let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.** And if you look at the context, you will see that he is talking about sowing things that will produce community. And so the kind of hope that the Spirit calls us to is not that we will find a church that meets all our needs, has no mistakes or problems, and that will not require any patience or perseverance on my part. We must be involved. We will only reap what we sow in hope.

We can increase hope in four ways. First, by keeping before our eyes the Scripture promises. Romans 15:4 says, **that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.** It's got to be a Biblically grounded hope. And I think that even though things are bad in the church universal, that there is hope that the Scripture sets forth for unity in doctrine, unity in holiness, unity in ministry and unity in goals. We must not give up.

Second, we must be a people of prayer who depend upon God. Romans 15:13 says, **Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** If hope comes from the power of the Spirit, then prayer is critical. 1 Peter 1:13 says, **rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you.** Our hope cannot be a humanistic Pollyanna hope, but a hope that takes the obstacles seriously and rests completely upon God's powerful grace to produce what we cannot.

Third, seeing success in other people's lives can give you hope. As 2 Corinthians 9:2 says, the changes in Corinth were producing hope in the Macedonians. We can strive to be a model that will encourage others to hope.

Fourth, developing our own maturity gives hope according to Romans 5:5. It says that character produces hope. Idealistic community is a shallow concept. Biblical community requires all four of these graces –a vision cast

by Scripture, a dependence upon grace, concrete examples of community lived out in the Bible and in our own church and a willingness to grow in character ourselves.

That is a big task, but the Holy Spirit is committed to producing that. It is a work of His grace.

II. Wrought by the Ministry of the One Son

A. Unity under His Lordship

But let's look at the next three things that bring unity. Verse 5 speaks of Christ's work when it says, **one Lord, one faith, one baptism...**

That phrase, **one Lord** was a rallying cry for the early-persecuted church. There could be no competition – no other lords. This verse says that we all share a common position of submission on our knees before Him as Lord. We're on common ground under his Lordship, and there cannot be unity when that Lordship is denied. Does that mean we all need to be perfectly holy? No. Paul goes on to demonstrate that the Ephesians weren't. But they all began at the same place: a heart submitted to the Lordship of Christ and willing to follow Him. Hebrews 2:11 says, **For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren...** Now if Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren while they still have lots to be sanctified, then neither should we be ashamed. But Christ made equally clear that those who reject His lordship are not saved. You cannot accept Him as Savior and not accept Him as Lord. There is no way that you can call the World Council of Churches or even the National Council of Churches part of this unity because they reject His Lordship on many levels. There are churches that I cannot have fellowship with because built into their doctrinal statement is a denial of the Lordship of Christ. In fact, in Matthew 7 He said that those who only call Him Lord, but refuse to obey Him are not saved. Holiness is not an option. So we enter into unity more and more the more we submit to His Lordship.

B. Unity by Receiving His Word

Secondly, we enter more and more into unity as we receive His Word more and more. Verse 5 insists that there is only **one faith...** And he is not talking about our subjective faith, but of *the* faith once for all delivered to the saints. Jude treats it as a body of truth that needs to be defended. And in

the rest of this chapter Paul is going to say the same. We may not totally understand what that one faith which is given in the Scriptures is, but there can be no unity if we willfully neglect it or reject it. Christ has given the faith and verse 13 calls us to **come to the unity of the faith...** It really bothers me to see the attempts at unity in the church by making the doctrinal statements smaller and smaller. That's the opposite direction that this chapter wants us to go. I hear the slogan, "Let's not talk about doctrine; doctrine divides." But the New Testament constantly insists on true doctrine. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones once said, "Doctrine is being discounted in the interests of supposed unity. The fact is, however, that there is no unity apart from truth and doctrine, and it is departure from this that causes division and breaks unity." Can you see that? It is departure from doctrine that breaks down unity. And I have been gratified to see a reversal of this dumbing down of doctrine by the Coalition on Revival and the International Church Council. Both organizations have done phenomenal work to address the heresies in the church and to make extensive booklets outlining the true faith of the church. If you want a copy of these doctrinal statements that are even now being hammered out internationally, I can get you copies of the progress that has been made. And it is phenomenal. It is an attempt toward unity in the faith.

C. Unity by Receiving His Baptism

The third thing that Christ does is to give baptism. **One Lord, one faith, one baptism.** Some think this is referring to water baptism, but the Gospels tell us that Jesus didn't baptize one single person with water. He had his disciples do that. This verse is referring to a baptism that Christ performs, not which man performs. What was the baptism that Jesus performed? Well, John the Baptist tells us. He said, **I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.** And so you can see a dovetailing of the work of Spirit and the work of Son. Christ baptizes His people with the Spirit at regeneration. And there can be no unity without regeneration and the gift of the Spirit.

And so verse 5 contrasts the counterfeit unities found in false ecumenical movements with the unity that Christ established. They speak of all religions getting together, but that would be to affirm many lords, not one lord. They affirm that there are many paths to heaven and try to dismiss doctrinal divisions, but this insists that there is only one faith. And we shouldn't be even remotely interested in any ecumenical unity that dilutes the faith. The baptism of the Spirit is exclusionary. While His elect are

baptized with the Spirit, all unbelievers will be baptized with fire in hell.

III. Wrought by the Ministry of the One Father

A. There can be only one true family if there is only one true Father

But finally, there is only one Father. Verse 6 says, **One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.** The Pharisees claimed to be the true church but Jesus denied that they had God as their father. He said, **You are of your father the devil and the lusts of your father you want to do.** This is as clear a denial as you can get of the liberal idea of the universal brotherhood of mankind and of God's fatherhood over the non-elect. Hebrews 12 says that those who are not chastened by God are not loved by God and are illegitimate and not sons. But He is the Father of *all in the body* (and that's the context), and children who own Him as Father should not reject each other as brothers and sisters. So it's important that we not take the "all" as broader than the context (which is the body of the previous verse and the "you" of this verse), and it's also important that we take the "all" seriously.

When the emergent church leader, Brian McLaren twists this verse into a proof text for universal salvation, the divine spark being in everyone, and everyone eventually being merged back into God He is taking it out of context and making community much broader than God does. And we'll look at that in a moment.

But it's important that we not make the lines narrower than God does either. Once you are in God's family, it would be insulting to God the Father to tell Him that you won't associate with His children. So those are the two errors that we need to avoid – being so loose that there are no lines around Jerusalem (and all religions are embraced) or being so restricted that we think we are the only true church. We are family because of the one Father that we have in common.

B. The Father brings unity by causing all true believers to submit to His will

So, this verse says first of all that the Father is **above all**. He is transcendent. This stands in contrast to heretical monism that makes God so close that He is indistinguishable from the Creation. God is not to be confused with the creation. He is above the creation, different from the creation and transcendent. In total contrast, Brian McLaren and other

Emergent Church leaders describe themselves as Panentheists. Doug Pagitt says, [In the Emerging Church] the idea that there is a necessary distinction of...creation from creator is being reconsidered.” Man! When you read their writings you begin to realize that it is majorly being reconsidered. Initially I just ignored this movement because they seemed so far out. I mean, they are actually introducing New Age Paganism into the evangelical church. But the problem is, they are such smooth talkers and writers that many people simply do not get it. They will quote a passage like this to try to prove their panentheism and their radical redefinition of community. They use evangelical language to bring in what they call a New Light theology. Let me just give you a sample dialogue that denies that the Father is transcendent. One of their leaders quotes Jesus, “I am the bread.” He said that if you really believe Jesus, you will take Him literally. Jesus is the bread, which means that the bread is also Jesus. This means that there is not an ultimate distinction between the Creator and the created. [Do you see where he is going? He goes on.] The created is just part of God. He went on to say that Jesus could have just as well said that “I am the chair, and the chair is me.” Or, “I am you and you are Me.” Or “God is creation and creation is God.” His conclusion was that we are all in God, and God is in all of us. And everything will be merged into one. But Paul’s first phrase indicates that there is a transcendence that implies a Creator-creature distinction. It also implies the Father’s authority over the church and the importance of our submitting to His word, which these people are sure not doing.

C. The Father brings unity by causing His grace to flow through us to others

The next phrase says that He is through us all. That means that He causes His grace to flow through us to others. God knows nothing of people who take in and take in and never give out. If your lake has no outlet, it is a dead sea. If the word “through” is not true of you, then you are a dead sea. Jesus said, **He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.** That means that every believer is not only a receiver of water, but also a giver of water. Every believer. This giving of grace to each other is essential to community. Christians who drink of God’s grace find that out of their innermost being flow rivers of living waters. God works through us, which means that we must minister to others if we are family. We have family responsibilities. And it is God ministering through us that produces community.

D. The Father brings unity by causing His presence to be seen all true believers.

Finally, it says that He is in you all. Now McLaren says that God is in everyone. But the “you” or the majority Text “us” that he is talking about is the church. God is not in everyone in the redemptive sense meant here. Sure God is omnipresent. But this is speaking of God’s community being above us, through us and in us. I’ll give you an example. In John 14:23 Jesus said, **If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.** This is the indwelling of fellowship. God’s presence within each member is a power that brings fellowship. Can you see the place that these three verses have in this whole discussion?

So in verses 4-6 we find that we need the power of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in order to achieve the community that we are called to. The liberal conception of community simply will not do. It is simply a new pagan substitute that is devoid of God’s power.

The Puritan John Bunyan wrote a lot of poetry, and one stanza that I have not been able to forget ever since John Piper quoted it several years ago is this:

Run, John, run! The law demands
But gives me neither feet nor hands
Fly, John fly! The Gospel sings
And by its grace it gives me wings.

God’s law demands that we have community. But it doesn’t empower us to do so. And to try in our strength is to set ourselves up for frustration. The Gospel as pictured in this feast calls us to union and communion such as no man in the world could dream of having. And it also gives us the wings by which that is possible.

We had pumps in Canada that had to have water poured into them to prime them before they could pump out water. That is the way it is in our lives. God must shed abroad His love in our hearts before we have the grace to pour out rivers of living waters to others. So this morning, if you are thirsty and dry yourself, and you are unable to minister in a spirit of koinonia fellowship, love and communion with others, look to the Spirit for empowering, look to Christ and drink of Him and look to the Father’s transcendent community to live their fullness in you and through you. It is only in him that Biblical community can be empowered. Amen