**Building Up the Body of Christ Through 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 week we learned of how apostle Paul encouraged young Timothy to lead God’s ministry in the midst of terrible times. Today we jump into the book of Ephesians to extract lessons on what is the key ingredient to the building up of Christ body the church. Have you ever wondered when you look at the composition of the church, I mean we are even a small ministry, but the body of believers, we all different, coming from different backgrounds and culture. How is it possible to work together as one and in love? What is the key ingredient necessary for unity of believers? Did Jesus equip believers with something so His body the church can thrive? What is Jesus goal and desire for the church, his body in this world? I pray that we may all learn one word of God so we may all participate in building up the body of Christ Jesus. Amen!

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 urges us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. What does this mean? What is this calling we have received? Throughout the book of Ephesians chp 1 to 3, Paul describes this knew life, this new calling, from being slaves of sin to being slaves of God. That is why Paul could begin by saying he is a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, though he was imprisoned in Rome. This shows that he was fully submitted to the sovereign will of God. He was captured by what God had planned for his life and not his own ideas. He was living a life worthy of the calling he had received. As I said, Ephesians chp 1 to 3 reminds us of this new calling. It reminds us that Jesus blessed us with all spiritual blessings. He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. He made us to be holy, to be blameless. He adopted us. He made us to the praise of His glory. He has given us redemption, forgiveness. He’s given us wisdom, prudence. He’s made known to us the mystery of His will.

Jesus has granted to us the Holy Spirit. He’s given us resurrection power. He’s made us alive from the dead. He’s taken us who are afar off, who are lost, who are cut off, and He’s made us one new person in Himself. He’s given to us the great mystery of the truth of the gospel, the truth of the church. And He’s made it possible for us to capitalize on all of this by giving us His Holy Spirit who can strengthen the inner man so that we can be filled with love, so we can have the fullness of God[3:20]. And God has done it all for His own glory. He’s done everything for us. And so Paul says, knowing this and the grace we have experienced in Christ Jesus live a life worthy of this calling. Someone might ask, what does that look like?

Look at Hebrews chapter 11. That tells us about the great heroes of faith. First there was Abel, in verse 4, who “offered to God a more excellent sacrifice.” And then there was Enoch. Why he walked so worthy, one day he took a walk with God and God liked him so much, and their fellowship was so sweet he just kept on walking, and the two of them walked right up to glory, and he never even died.

And then there was Noah. And Noah walked with God for 120 years while he built that boat. And then there was Abraham. And Abraham and Sarah, they walked with God, and they walked a worthy walk, a walk of faith. Then there was Isaac, and then there was Jacob, and then there was Joseph, and then there was Moses. Against the opposition and against the system, they walked with God. And theirs was a worthy walk. They lived up to what they knew and had received from God. God has changed our hearts, God has called us to be prisoners of his sovereign will. Like the prodigal son story, For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found [Luke 15:24]. Through Jesus blood on the cross, we are alive, we are found by God. Now Paul urges us, in light of all this amazing love of God, live a life worthy of the grace we have received. In the context of building the body of Christ Jesus, the church what does that look like?

**Firstly, humility, gentleness and love**, look at verse 2, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Since we have received much love and grace from God, Jesus had to bear with our weaknesses. If we have truly received a clear calling from God and we know of his love, then should we not be humble, gentle and patient with one another. Should we not bear with one another in love?

**Secondly, unity of the spirit,** lets all read verse 3, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Unity of believers is very important such that Apostle Paul even says, make every effort. Meaning that it is not something that will come naturally. But we have to be intentional about it by making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit. Let us further look a bit why this unity is important/essential for the Church. I will use Jesus prayer in John 17:20-22, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one”. Jesus prayer is not for the disciples alone, but also for those who will believe in Jesus through the message of the disciples. Jesus prayed that they may all be one. And so this unity is not only for the local church, but for all believers to be one. Jesus prayer, father just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us. Already Jesus and the father are one, they work in unison, Jesus prayed that we as believers may join in that unity. Take note that, as believes we do not create the unity, the unity is already there. That is why Paul says, make every effort to KEEP the unity of the Spirit. Also in Jesus prayer, Jesus prays that we may join into the already existing unity between Him and the father. So our efforts should be on maintaining and keeping what already exist. This was actually a new realization for me during our bible study, that believers are not asked to create unity, the unity of the spirit already exists. Now back to our question, why is this unity so important?

In Jesus prayer, John 17:21 we read, “…that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us **so that the world may believe that you have sent me.** 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” This unity is important because it is through our oneness that the world will believe that Jesus was sent by God for world salvation. This means that the credibility of the gospel is built on the ground of the unity of the church. The purpose of our unity is so that the world may believe the gospel. My Individual testimonies is white smoke, has power or meaning, if it’s not substantiated by a living, transformed, church. It is the unity of the church, the power of the church that lays the groundwork for individual testimony.

Now what kind of unity are we talking about? It says the unity of the spirit. That means it is something internal, not necessarily structural. Verse 4-6 say, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” We have unity because of what we share in common. In Jesus we share one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one Father. Anyone who’s in Christ is a new creation. Christ lives in us. We have become partakers of the divine nature. We have become temples of the Holy Spirit. We have become the abiding place of God. Therefore, when the church is the church, it is collectively the dwelling place of God. It is the unity of divine life. It is the unity of spiritual life. It is the unity of eternal life. It is the unity of common mind, common truth, common will that is pleasing to God. It is the unity of a common motive, a common purpose, a common mission. And so that prayer for the internal unity of the church was answered by the Father. We are one, we are one; all who are in Christ are one. We are the one church. We possess that internal spiritual life.

John 17:22 says, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” This should be our reality, that we already possess a shared glory, and it is this shared glory that cause us to be one. Though our bodies are made of clay, we have divine nature placed in us. A call to a divine life. We therefore should possess all of the evidences of that, not only in our individual lives but in our collective life together. This glory, this divine nature given us should provide us with more joy, more comfort, more peace, more satisfaction and more love than anything and everything the world has to offer. This is where we ought to find all our satisfaction and delight. And once we have this unity of the spirit, we will be able to work together collectively in one mission for Jesus. In other words the world would be able to see and thus the church will become a testimony, that indeed God sent Jesus. It is my prayer that, this unity of the spirit born out of the redemptive work of Christ Jesus in our lives, may be at the top of our value system. For this is how the church can be a true witness of Christ Jesus. Amen!

Now that we know the kind of attitude we ought to have, that God desires for believers to be united in Him and power of oneness in Him to the world. How does God work unity through the church? From verses 7-10, we are also reminded that each one of us have been given potions of grace according to Christ Jesus, which are also portions of his gifts **to believers**. Let us all read verses 11-13, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13until 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.” God has equipped his people for works of service (ministry) so that the body of Christ may be built up. And we know what we are being built up into, until we reach unity in the faith, in doctrine of Christ, to we reach the full measure of Christ Jesus. As we know to work on something so you may achieve something you need equipment. What is the equipment for the church? We are told its gifts given by Jesus to all believers. This means that all believers have something to serve the church with, so that we all reach unity in the faith and attaining to whole measure of the fullness of Christ Jesus.

As we exercise our gifts, then believers are built up in God’s truth, no longer infants and being deceived [14]. Instead by speaking the truth to one another in love, we grow to become the mature body of Christ Jesus [15]. And it is truly when we continue to do our part in serving one another, that the body of Christ Jesus grows, look at verse 16, 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.

For many years I knew about the importance of unity, I even recently found an old South African, 1963 one cent, it is written on it, unity is strength. I have also believed that, one needs to strive for unity so there is peace and harmony. In the context of the Church, I have always thought that as a believer I am responsible of creating unity. When shd Jacob led ministry and later on shd Christian, I used to simply accept direction in the name of unity and peace. When my marriage decision was on the table, it really became difficult time because now it was a matter of my heart, I was now one of the leaders of the ministry and new very well the vision and direction of our ministry. It was a calling I fully accepted before God for campus missions. There was a lady I liked who was not in our ministry and was even relatively young in the faith. I could discern a deep struggle to make peace with marrying her. I was confronted with this question, whom am I trying to please? Is this for myself or is this to continue serving in my calling as a campus shepherd. The lord made it clear to me, marrying her was not in line with His calling for my life. And to proceed I would be disturbing the unity of the church. And so through the word of God, I had to humbly surrender my human will so I could embrace the will of God. And so through this passage, I am glad to realize that, I am not called to create unity, but rather the unity of the spirit is already there. My role is to recognize it and strive to keep it. I newly learning that, in the body of Christ, God expects conformity. Not a conformity to rules and regulations out of fear. Not a conformity to rules and regulations out of legalistic pride, but a conformity to righteousness out of deep love and affection for Jesus Christ. Because of all that He has done for me. Now as a leader of this ministry, my role is to strive to live a life worthy of His calling, to present Jesus, to preach Jesus and commit to teaching His word so we can all be conformed to the fulness of Christ Jesus. Amen!

**In conclusion**, it is our duty to do everything possible in our lives to preserve this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by what the lord has laid out for us in this passage. Working at unity is primarily working, not on somebody else, but on our own life. Working on unity means humbling ourselves and pursuing unity by being concerned about others, not being concerned about ourselves. As long as self is at the center, as long as your feelings, your desires, your rights, your privileges, your prestige, your place, your concerns are the chief concern, we will never see this kind of unity. And if we don’t, we will have denied the very essence of the Christian faith, because the Christian faith is all about unity. It is my prayer that strive to lie a life worthy of our calling, so that it is Jesus whom we uphold in all things even above our desires. When we are one with Jesus, we will manifest oneness with one another. May all of us become one with the father, son and the holy spirit. Amen!