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Sermon Notes

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An Urgent Appeal for Christian Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6

I. Living a Life Worthy of Our Calling (vs. 1)

A. A Major Transition in the Letter: From Doctrine to Lifestyle

1. Ephesians 1-3 has laid out some of the most astonishing, soaring, majestic doctrine we can possibly conceive of...
2. Paul has flown 50,000 feet above the surface of the earth and has looked down from on high to give us amazing perspective on what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ
3. Ephesians 1: God's eternal purpose in Christ
 - a. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
 - b. In love he predestined us to be adopted as sons
 - c. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins
 - d. Having heard the gospel, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit
 - e. Paul prays that we would understand the hope of our calling, the riches of our glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparable power at work in our lives
4. Ephesians 2: Our rescue from Satan's dark kingdom... and our establishment as living stones in the Spiritual temple of the church
5. Ephesians 3: Paul's amazing prayer for an astonishing experience of Christ's love for us

B. Paul's Moral Authority: A Prisoner of the Lord

C. Paul's Overarching Command: Live a Life Worthy of our Calling

1. Immediate command: making every effort to maintain Christian unity

2. Many other commands follow under this one summarizing command

a. Using spiritual gifts to build the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:7-16)

i) Unity... verses 2-6;

Ephesians 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

ii) Diversity... verses 7-11... various spiritual gifts given to each one

Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

iii) Maturity... verses 12-16

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.

b. Living a life of heart purity, hating sin and living in holiness (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Put off your old self... be made new in your minds... and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness

c. Many details of that holy life (Ephesians 4:25-5:21): the negatives and positives... what we must NOT DO (lying, sinful anger, unforgiveness, stealing, laziness, evil speech, bitterness, brawling, slander, sexual immorality) and what we MUST DO (hard work, giving to the needy, using our mouths to bless everyone who listens, being kind and compassionate, forgiving each other, worshiping together)... summary: living a life of LOVE, filled with the Spirit

Ephesians 5:2 live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

d. Christian marriage (Ephesians 5:21-33)

Wives submit to your husbands... husbands, love your wives

e. Christian parenting (Ephesians 6:1-4)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord... Fathers, do not exasperate your children

f. The Master/Slave relationship (Ephesians 6:5-9)

Slaves, obey your earthly masters and work hard for them... Masters, treat your slaves in light of the fact that you also have a Master in heaven

g. Spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-20)

All of this under the overarching command:

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

D. Our Calling: out of spiritual death to perfection in Christ

1. God's eternal purpose plainly stated

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Ephesians 1:4-5 In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

Romans 8:29-30 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

God has eternally predestined us to be PERFECTLY CONFORMED TO CHRIST... to be like him in every way possible... to love what he loves and hate what he hates; to desire what he desires, to choose what he chooses, to think like him about every possible topic all the time, to feel the same emotions he feels... exactly like him... ALSO perfectly conformed to Christ in his resurrection body as well:

Philippians 3:21 by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

His purpose, his CALL on our lives is to be GLORIFIED in the end... to be exactly like Christ as created beings under His perfect Lordship and rule.

2. Our previous life in Satan's dark kingdom plainly stated

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

3. Our spiritual position in Christ

Ephesians 2:4-6 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus

4. Our upward calling for the rest of our lives... PERFECT CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

^{ESV} Philippians 3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The HEAVENLY CALLING is the upward movement of the soul and the daily life toward perfection in Christ... being exactly like Jesus in all respects

Paul in Philippians 3 said he'd not achieved it yet, not arrive yet... so he was PRESSING ON after that UPWARD CALL of God in Christ:

1 Peter 1:16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Ultimately, our CALLING is to HEAVEN – the New Heaven and New Earth, the New Jerusalem, the “home of righteousness”, where only the holy people can dwell... where everything is perfectly pure and free from sin... where the entire redeemed universe will literally RADIATE with the glory of Christ

E. What is a life “WORTHY” of that Calling?

1. Worthy means a life that conforms to that high calling
2. A life that lines up with it, that lives out the purpose asserted in these verses
3. We are ROYALTY... we are to THINK like royalty, LOVE like royalty, ACT like royalty
4. THAT is “a life worthy of the calling we have received” in the gospel
5. Paul will be describing it in great detail over the next three chapters in Ephesians

And... he begins with an urgent appeal for Christian unity!!

II. Central Command: Maintain Unity in the Spirit (vs. 3)

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

A. Unity is the Goal of Christ's Redemption (Ephesians 1:10)

Ephesians 1:10 to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Sin is like a FRAGMENTATION GRENADE which blew everything in God's perfect universe apart...

In Christ, God is doing a work of redemption and restoration, bringing all things back together under Christ

B. Unity is the Essence of the Spiritual Temple Christ is Building (Ephesians 2:11-22)

Ephesians 2:12 you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-16 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

C. Unity is Patterned After the Trinity (John 17)

John 17:21 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.

D. The Focus Here: Church Unity

1. Paul has in mind not only the UNIVERSAL BODY OF CHRIST (the Church around the world and in heaven)... but also the LOCAL CHURCH (the Ephesian church)
2. He yearns for local churches to put on display the supernatural unity that is ours in Christ
3. He knows (as Jesus prayed) that as the church earnestly loves each other and lives out perfect unity, the witness of the church in this dark world will be powerfully effective
4. BUT if the church is fractious and divided, bickering and arguing, it will be powerless to spread the gospel and win the lost

E. Unity is Already Ours... But We Have to Live It Out

1. The word here is MAINTAIN the unity... to live out on earth what is already ours in the heavenly realms
 - a. The Greek word is “keep” = protect, defend, keep hold of
 - b. The unity has been won for us in Christ at the cross; it has been applied to us by the Spirit, now we have to LIVE IT OUT...protect it from all attacks
2. So much of the NT’s commands to Christians works like this: “This is what you already ARE, now LIVE LIKE IT!”
3. You ARE holy, so LIVE holy!
4. You ARE children of God, so boldly ASK him for things!
5. You ARE light in Christ, so SHINE like you are!
6. You ARE perfectly ONE in Christ, so ACT like you are!

F. Consistent Issue in the New Testament

1. Most of the epistles in the NT address issues of church unity
2. Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:10-11 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.

1 Corinthians 3:3-4 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For

when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

3. Philippians

Philippians 4:2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.

Philippians 1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

In other words, the success of the Philippian church in sharing the gospel will be directly affected by how UNITED they are... so he gives them this:

Philippians 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

4. Romans

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

Jew-Gentile unity is essential to their witness in Rome!

Every church struggles with UNITY... but it is VITAL to the health of the church; this is why Paul begins his application section in Ephesians with an appeal to unity

III. Supernatural Effort Required (vs. 2-3)

Ephesians 4:2-3 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

A. It will NOT be Easy! Three-fold enemy

1. The world, the flesh and the devil will constantly ASSAULT our unity
2. Our flesh: passionately committed to SELF!! To SELFISHNESS!!

3. Satan uses our selfishness and pride and ambition to rip us apart... to get us to start bickering and pursuing selfish goals
4. The world will pull us more and more to selfish, materialistic, pleasure-seeking pursuits.
5. So Paul begins with MORAL TRAITS needed for maintaining unity

B. Make EVERY Effort

1. Greek: be zealous, hasten, HURRY to do this
2. A sense of diligence... constant vigilance
3. Human relationships can go off the rails very quickly!!
4. Urgency here!!

Matthew 5:23-25 if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way..."

Ephesians 4:26-27 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

Church covenant:

To be slow to take offense, and always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

Image: constant vigilance on the city walls... an enemy may sneak in at any moment and open the gates to his army; then the city will be destroyed and everyone slaughtered; so it is with our CHRISTIAN UNITY! We have to protect it... but the real problem is that WE are the worst enemy... our pride is what destroys unity more than any other single force

C. Be Completely Humble

1. Humility is the first Christian virtue Paul lists... absolutely essential to maintaining Christian unity
2. Paul underscores it by putting it first and intensifying it:

"with ALL humility..."

Humble in ALL respects, at ALL times!! Humble about your strengths, humble about your weaknesses... humble especially toward other sinners

3. Humbling is of the essence of the gospel work in our hearts!
4. We are humbled by every aspect of redemption
 - a. Humbled by eternal election and predestination... for it was not by works but by the sovereign purpose of God
 - b. Humbled by the perfect law of God which shattered our self-reliance, because all the law ever did was promote and expose sin
 - c. Humbled by Christ's bloody redemption... for he gets all the credit and glory for saving us from the wrath of God that we deserved
 - d. Humbled by justification by grace alone, by faith alone... not by works, so that no one can boast
 - e. Humbled by our ongoing struggle with indwelling sin
5. It is PRIDE that destroys Church Unity... every member of FBC needs to go to the cross daily and be humbled by it

D. Be Gentle

1. Another word is MEEKNESS, lowliness, mildness
2. Jesus is picture as a Lamb, led to the slaughter
3. He called himself "Humble and gentle of heart"
4. Harshness is destructive, corrosive to the unity of the Body of Christ
5. Arrogant people—pastors, leaders, strong-willed personalities that throw their weight around and dominate others... giving harsh answers...

1 Kings 12:13-14 Rehoboam the king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, ¹⁴ he followed the advice of the young men and said, "My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions."

How many churches are ripped apart by harshness, unkindness, rude answers and strong words?!

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Matthew Henry: By *meekness*, [Paul means] that excellent disposition of soul which makes men unwilling to provoke others, and not easily to be

provoked or offended with their infirmities; and it is opposed to angry resentments and peevishness.

E. Be Patient, Bearing with One Another in Love

1. Paul commands long-suffering. Waiting on God to work in other people... letting God do his patient work of sanctification in another brother or sister's life... people don't grow to maturity overnight
2. Especially: An eagerness to FORGIVE SINS and put up with annoying irritations in each other
3. We FORGIVE whatever sins others commit against us because God has been so patient and forgiving with us
4. We BEAR WITH minor irritations and annoyances—the way someone laughs too loudly, or their repetitive sneezes during allergy season; the way someone always likes to top your story with a better one; the way someone grabs “your parking spot” or “your pew”

The better you know someone and the more time you spend with them, the more some aspects of their daily patterns and way of life will start to ANNOY you; you have to resist that temptation and MAKE EVERY EFFORT to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

F. Unity of the SPIRIT

1. The unity is IN THE SPIRIT
2. The Holy Spirit makes us one; gives us commonality
3. The Holy Spirit mediated Christ crucified and resurrected to you; he is what makes people from widely different backgrounds—Jew, Gentile, male, female, young, old, rich, poor, successful and unsuccessful. barbarian, Scythian, slave, free—makes us ONE IN CHRIST through the same gospel message
4. The Spirit also supernaturally WORKS unity by giving us the fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

G. The Bond of Peace

1. This harkens back to the peace we have with God through faith in Christ

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2. BUT it also refers to a sense of peacefulness that comes over the mind, calming us down, making us serene with each other

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

3. Peacefulness between brothers and sisters in Christ is exceptionally sweet

There is a WHOLE PSALM devoted to the delight of peacefulness and unity:

Psalm 133:1-3 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ² It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. ³ It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

This is something the world just doesn't have!

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. ²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Simply put... we are to fight SIN and Satan's efforts to divide us; we are to bear with each other and forgive each other; we are to be CONSTANTLY VIGILENT to maintain unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace

IV. The Seven-fold Basis of Our Unity (vs. 4-6)

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

A. Stunning Assertions of Doctrinal Truth: Seven-Fold Unity

1. Paul establishes how perfectly ONE we already are (if we are in Christ)
2. On that basis we should LIVE as ONE as we really are!

B. Note the Trinity... the Basis of All Unity

1. The Spirit... the Lord... God
2. One Spirit... One Lord... One God

3. The three-ness of God is not the mystery...
4. The PERFECT UNITY of God in three persons, that is the true mystery
5. The oneness between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is perfect!

1 Corinthians 1:10 “Perfectly united in mind and thought...”

***1 Corinthians 2:10-11 The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹
For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit
within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the
Spirit of God.***

***Romans 8:27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because
the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.***

So the Holy Spirit searches the mind of God and understands it perfectly, and
then works that mind in us through Christ...

1 Corinthians 2:16 ... we have the mind of Christ.

C. One Body

1. Christ is only working ONE BODY in the world
2. He doesn't have separate works he is doing... something here in the U.S.,
something different in Iran or China...
3. NO! There is, worldwide, only ONE body of Christ
4. Here we have again the idea of the church as his BODY

***Ephesians 1:22-23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be
head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him
who fills everything in every way***

5. We'll get this image unfolded more in detail in the next section:

***Ephesians 4:16 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.***

6. It is vital for us to realize that the church is ONE around the world... Christians
from every tribe and language and people and nation have all been made
members of this ONE BODY

D. One Spirit... as we said; we don't receive a different Spirit than other Christians

1. So the same Holy Spirit at work in MY HEART is also at work in my brother's heart or my sister's heart
2. Vital to remember if we are tempted to have some conflict!

E. One Hope When You Were Called

1. That one hope is HEAVEN, as we said; the New Heaven and New Earth; the New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:1-3 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

2. How vital it is when tempted to have a conflict to remember that we are going to the exact same place
3. We have the same hope burning in our hearts; we are travelling along the same road

F. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

1. Let's take these together... these three are a cluster of how sinners enter the church, forgiven of their sins, members of the same Body
2. There is only One Jesus Christ, one Savior for the world
3. How can we trust in Christ for the salvation of our sins, and be at odds with another sinner who is also trusting the same Christ
4. The same faith that saves me also saves every Christian on the face of the earth... every genuine brother or sister in Christ makes the same profession of faith in Jesus

Romans 10:9-13 if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

5. So also ONE BAPTISM (probably not water baptism, but the baptism of the Spirit)

Matthew 3:11 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For 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.

6. By that work of saving grace, we have been IMMERSED into Christ, IMMERSED into the same ocean of grace, the same cleansing blood of Jesus cleanses us all

7. There is NO OTHER SAVIOR than Christ... He is the ONE LORD for the entire human race

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

Philippians 2:9-11 God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The church is made up of people who have by faith bent the knee to King Jesus and are swearing allegiance to Him! There is ONLY ONE Lord... so how can there ever be divisions among us?

G. One God and Father...

Ephesians 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1. There is only one God... there is not a God of the Jews and a different God of the Gentiles too

Romans 3:29-30 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, ³⁰ since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

2. Paul here asserts the infinite majesty of the one true God, over all, through all, in all

a. Over all = God's absolute sovereignty over the universe and over ever created being

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit

b. Through all and in all

Acts 17:28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

V. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

B. Live a Life Worthy of Your Calling as a Child of God

1. Ask yourself continually: Is what I am doing right now WORTHY OF CHRIST?
2. Is my attitude toward this brother or sister WORTHY OF CHRIST?
3. Is the movie I'm watching WORTHY OF CHRIST?
4. Is the fruit of my life WORTHY OF CHRIST?

C. Prize the Unity of this Church

1. Paul speaks at length of the unity we enjoy... one body, one Spirit, one calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father...
2. The more openly and beautifully united we are, the more powerfully the gospel will be put on display
3. Let's openly love one another

D. Expect Constant Satanic Attack On Your Marriage, Your Family, and Your Church

1. Later, Paul will command us to put on our spiritual armor and fight
2. I think it's worthy to mention it NOW... we have to WAGE WAR against Satan to stay united with each other... in marriage, in family life, and in the church

E. Let's Especially Work on Forgiveness

1. Sometimes we need to work hard on reconciliation
2. We need to get together with someone with whom we've had a challenging interaction
3. We need to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"