ADULTS

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE™

**Sermon Series:** Connected: My Life in the Church
**To be used with:** Session Two: Connected in Unity
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**
One
The Necessity of Unity
**Scripture:** Ephesians 4:1-6

**Connection To Unit Theme***:* *Connected: My Life in the Church* is a six session study from the book of Ephesians, based on *I Am A Church Member* by Thom Rainer. These theme-based sermon outlines will cover the same topics and Scripture passages as are being studied in the small groups. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about. Session 2 of *Connected* is called "Connected in Unity" and The Point is, "Unity is a given, but staying unified takes work."

We have been united by Christ, but we must maintain that unity. Unity in the body of Christ is not an option. The Holy Spirit calls us to maintain unity through certain grace. Our unity is grounded in who God is and what He has done for us.

**Introduction:**
Once, a preacher was walking across a bridge, and he saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So the preacher ran over and said "Stop! don't do it!" "Why shouldn't I?" he said. The preacher said, "Well, there's so much to live for!"

"Like what?" asked the man.

"Well...are you religious or atheist?" He said, "Religious."

The preacher said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?" He said, "Christian."

The preacher said, "Me too! Are you catholic or protestant?" He said, "Protestant."

The preacher said, "Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" He said, "Baptist!"

The preacher said, "Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist church of God or Baptist church of the Lord?" He said, "Baptist church of God!"

The preacher said, "Me too! Are you original Baptist church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist church of God?" He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God!"

The preacher said, "Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?" He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!"

The preacher said, "Die, heretic scum", and pushed him off[1].

We have a tendency to nervously laugh at a joke like that. It's humorous to us because we've been involved in our own share of petty squabbles. But we also laugh with a tinge of guilt because we know that we are called to maintain unity and such an episode is everything but.

Unity is not optional. It is a part of God's redemptive process. To sow seeds of disunity is to go against the work of God. P.T. O'Brien is correct, "To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do despite the gracious reconciling work of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that his sacrificial death, by which relationships with God and others has been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, have no [meaning] to us![2]"

In Ephesians 4:1-6 we see not only the call to unity but also the reason for our unity.

## I. The call to unity (Ephesians 4:1-3)

[1] I've told this joke several times and I'm not even certain where I first heard it. The nearest that I can tell this is the origin: http://cmgm.stanford.edu/~lkozar/EmoPhillips.html
[2] Peter T. O'Brien, Pillar Commentary on Ephesians, p280

Note that this text calls us to "maintain unity". Christ has already purchased our unity. We are united, that is a fact. But we can live in rebellion instead of redemption and by so doing we'll move away from unity. In this text Paul gives four ways to maintain unity.

Humility

- C.J. Mahaney gives a helpful us a helpful definition of humility, "Honestly assessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness[3]". Humility does not mean thinking of yourself lower than you actually are—it means viewing yourself accurately in light of your sinfulness and God's holiness.
- Humility is best illustrated by a turtle on a fence post. If you see a turtle on a fence post you know that somebody helped him to get there. In the same way humility comes from realizing that Jesus is the hero of your story.
- Contrast how humility and pride show themselves in the body of Christ.

Gentleness

- Gentleness was considered a vice in Rome. Even in our culture when we think of someone as meek we often picture a doormat.
- A better picture of gentleness is that of Clark Kent. Outwardly he's an unassuming nerd but inwardly he is faster than a speeding bullet and stronger than a locomotive.
- Gentleness is having a great consideration of others. It is shown by waving our own rights for the sake of others.
- Contrast gentleness with violence, rudeness, and forcefulness in the body of Christ.

Patience and Loving Forbearance

- Biblical patience allows for the shortcomings of others.
- Loving endurance is closely relate. It is the ability to endure wrong rather than respond in a rage.
- The two are illustrated well by an old dog with a little puppy. The little puppy keeps yipping at the big dog and nibbling at his ears. Rather than getting annoyed the old dog maintains its posture and doesn't bite the puppy in response. He puts up with quite a bit of the annoyance.
- Contrast patience with impatience in the body of Christ

*Application*: Does your posture towards others do more to maintain unity or does it foster disunity? How does the reality of the gospel shape these graces in your life?

## II. The ground of unity (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Unity for the sake of unity is not what the Lord is calling for here. The unity that is to be found in the local church is one that is grounded in our identity. Ephesians 4:4-6 shows us two major things. First, that we have been united around essential things (such as the Trinity). Secondly, that our unity has substance, it is grounded in truth.

Note the different essentials that we have in common. Whenever we move away from these essentials we are no longer in unity. But while we share these beliefs in common we are in essence united. The church truly is one body. That is true in the local church and it is true in the universal church. This is true because of who God is and what He has done in the life of every believer.

[3] C.J. Mahaney, Humility.

**Conclusion:**

Have everyone in the congregation pick a number 1-10. Have them shout out that number in unison. Then have everyone multiply that number by 2. Give a little time for people to do the math. Have them shout out the new number in unison. Then have everyone add 2 to that new number. Shout out the new number. Now divide that number by 2. Again have everyone shout out that number in unison. Now have everyone subtract their original number. Now shout out that new number[4].

If everyone did this correctly everyone should be shouting "One". Though they started with a different number and came from a totally different spot they arrived at the same spot. This is what the Lord does for us. He has united diverse people and made us one. We are called to maintain that unity.

Apart from the work of Christ being applied to your life by grace through faith, though, you do not have a "new number". You are stuck on that old number. You are not in unity with other believes because you have not been united to our common Head, Jesus Christ.
Call to faith and repentance. Also, call believers to faith and repentance for ways that they have not maintained the unity that Christ has purchased.

*Mike Leake is associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Jasper, IN. He and his wife, Nikki have two children (Isaiah and Hannah). Follow Mike on Twitter @mikeleake, or his blog at http://mikeleake.net*

[4] I first heard this illustration from Dr. Tom Hufty in college.