

Unity (Part 7): Ephesians 4 (D)

Humility and Meekness

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This sermon marks the seventh in a series on Ephesians 4 and unity. I'm beginning to believe the English commentator who remarked that he believed that more has been written on unity than any other single subject that has to do with the church as an institution.

Mankind as a whole has been plagued by disunity since Adam and Eve. It's hard to say whether wars between nations are a cause or effect of this disunity. We see wars in a family that result in divorce. We see wars between parents and children leading to separations in those regards as well. But even with the wars aside, history seems to show that we can be united only for short periods of time. We seem to be able to effect a form of unity when we join together in some common cause. But when that common cause is accomplished, a sort of vacuum is created and the unity disappears.

God is going to produce a unity that will endure forever, and we in the church are in the cutting edge of a work of prodigious scope. It's a work that will ultimately bring all of mankind that has ever lived into agreement with God and in one family. But each of us, individually, is required to perform his part in understanding what the common cause is and voluntarily, by faith, subject ourselves to its requirements. It will not be accomplished any other way because this unity is not so much imposed as it is generated from within because it is a spiritual unity.

I want you to turn to Ephesians 5:18-21, because here in this epistle, whose primary theme is unity, Paul lists several characteristics that will appear in those who are filled with the spirit that is going to produce this unity.

Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit . . .

Now notice what follows, because what Paul is pointing out is what will follow those who are filled with the spirit.

Ephesians 5:19-21 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Now notice again:

Those who are filled with the spirit will exhort and instruct each other. It doesn't say that they will judge, criticize and correct. They will exhort and instruct one another.

They will sing songs of praise.

They will be grateful, always in all things to God for what He has allowed to come into their lives. I think the emphasis there has to be ALL things, what we might consider the bad things and the good things. Those who are filled with the spirit will be grateful because they understand it's for their good.

They will mutually defer to each other as long as it is all in the fear of the Lord. That is, they will submit to what is in accord with what pleases God.

Almost the entirety of the remainder of this epistle (Ephesians) is devoted to submitting yourselves to one another because it is essential to unity. So Paul brings the subject right into a smaller venue, the home and husband and wife relationships. He shows submitting's relevance to husband and wife unity and then in chapter 6, he moves into parent and child unity.

Many of the factors that we must submit to in a common cause are delivered or revealed to us in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Then, following that word 'therefore' Paul launches into instruction regarding the elements of character we must employ in order to submit.

Now back in Ephesians 4 and we'll look for the third or fourth or maybe the fifteenth time at Ephesians 4, verses 2 and 3.

Ephesians 4:2-3 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Walk worthy, humility, meekness, patience and forbearance. These will lead to submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord.

Walking worthy of our vocation is referring to the process of sanctification. Our vocation is our calling and we are called to become holy as God is holy. Paul calls upon us to be balanced in our approach, so he is effectively saying, "Never stop studying." This is in order that the vision is kept alive. That's the common cause—that the vision is kept alive and constantly refined by more and greater understanding.

The second part of it is, "Put it into practice." Put the doctrinal base, the common cause, into practice because salvation not only consists of believing truth, but also using and applying it so it becomes written into our very character. Doing this will require faith and the setting of the will, the disciplining of the self to follow the correct path in what we know to do.

Before looking more closely at the other four elements (we already looked at walking worthy in the previous sermon), I want to jump to verse 3 and look at the word endeavor or endeavoring.

We think of the word *endeavor* to mean "to make an attempt at." That is exactly what the English word means. However, that's not what the word means in Greek.

II Timothy 2:15 Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

That word "study" is the same word that is translated *endeavor* in Ephesians 4:3. Now, unfortunately, it's not translated correctly here either. The reason

is because when it was translated in 1611 by the King James translators, the word "study" meant what this word in Greek means. It was much closer. But during the centuries that word "study" has changed in its usage. To us the word "study" means, "hit the books." To us the word study means "do research." To us the word "study" means, "peer or look or scrutinize very closely." Usually if you're doing that you're probably sitting at a table or you're standing still while you study something.

The Greek word means, "make haste." It means, "hurry." It means, "be diligent." What Paul is saying there, back in Ephesians 4:3, is be diligent, hurry, study, make speed with respect to unity. He is saying don't delay, this is too important to let slip by. He is saying that it should be at the forefront of our minds.

Be diligent doing what? The word *keeping* means "guarding, preserving." Be diligent guarding unity. Be diligent preserving unity. Be diligent holding fast to unity. Why do we have to *keep*, why do we have to *guard*, why do we have to *preserve*? Paul is not asking us to make unity or create unity, because we cannot create or make something that already exists. What we have to do is protect it.

The explanation of this is simple. God sees us as part of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. Just as surely as all parts of your physical body are united, so also is Christ's spiritual body. However, not all parts of your body or my body work equally well. Some parts are diseased, some parts are damaged, usually because of genetics or abuse or accident, and they give us problems.

In like manner, we—the church of God—have been spiritually weakened and then corporately, we flew apart because we didn't guard what we already had. We already had the Father. We already had the Son. We already had the Holy Spirit. We already had Herbert Armstrong. We already had the message. We had the doctrines, the traditions, the policies. But we're not together are we? We flew apart and that is evidence that we didn't guard it.

We most obviously allowed the theological, the philosophical and the attitudinal base to deteriorate under the persuasions of the world. The result was that our faith and thus our hope and our love were seriously weakened and we scattered. I think that the cause and effect are very easily traced.

In I Timothy 6:20, in one of the final epistles that Paul wrote, he gave this advice:

I Timothy 6:20-21 O Timothy [it's an appeal], keep [There's that word again. *Guard. Protect. Preserve.*] that which is committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings [Why? Because they would weaken what he had.] and oppositions of science [that word translates into the English word "knowledge" today] falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with you.

What Timothy had committed to *him*—to his trust (a trust is something that you guard)—was the gospel that Paul preached to him containing the doctrines which, if diligently believed and followed, lead to holiness and to salvation. Those same truths were committed to us through Herbert Armstrong, but we didn't guard them, and we split.

So Paul is saying that we are to be diligent in guarding the unity of the spirit. If we believe in God, our first responsibility is to guard in order that we might preserve and build upon what we have. That means, in practical application, going on the offensive to apply. It means aggressively disciplining the self to do God's will in all relationships.

I read two very interesting papers this week. Both of them were in regard to the family. Putting the two together, I reached a conclusion that I think is correct. The two of them together contain a very convincing argument using the French and the American Revolutions, which occurred less than twenty-five years apart. Using these revolutions as a historical base, they showed that liberty (because that's what we feel historically our political liberty came from and that's where the French look upon their political liberty coming from) without self-discipline produces individualism, i.e., in the Biblical term, every man doing what is right in his own eyes, which in turn produces chaos, scattering and then terror (we would call tribulation). Then finally it reverts back to slavery under an oppressive, dictatorial government to the end that order might be restored.

That's where we are headed as a nation. We are unraveling. Our liberties are disappearing. The government is moving very rapidly through executive orders to take our liberties from us because they fear that society is breaking down and they are using these things as an excuse. If this went on long enough we would have a dictatorship.

I bring these things to you because the church is pretty much following the same track. Liberty, without self-discipline, produces: "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes." Scattering is what has occurred. What lies next in prophecy? Tribulation. We are on that track. So be aware that, historically, what is happening to the church is following exactly what happens culturally and politically in a nation.

Paul lists four basic elements of character that we must exercise in order to guard our liberty and the unity as a body. They are humility, meekness, patience and forbearance.

The first one is an internal quality or attitude and I'm going to spend a good bit of time on this. It's an internal quality or attitude, and the other three are how the first is applied in a practical situation.

It says, "with all lowliness."

I want you to read Philippians 2:1-5, because Philippians 2 is written to a congregation that had a division problem within it because two ladies were having a fight, a very strong disagreement. So understand that is partly why Paul wrote in Philippians what he wrote. He wrote in broad principles how the division that existed between these two ladies, and between any two people all down through history, can be healed.

Philippians 2:1-2 If there be therefore any consolation [or encouragement] in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels in mercies, fulfill you my joy, that you be likeminded, ["heal this thing," he is saying] having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

You can see that that's going to give the responsibility to each person to do what they need to do to heal this.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done . . .

Here he's getting, I think, right to the heart of the problem. One or the other or both of these ladies had a problem with pride, with vanity.

Philippians 2:3-5 . . . through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Did you notice that *lowliness* appears in both Ephesians 4:2 and Philippians 2:3? It's the only place in the Bible that these two words appear in the Greek. It's actually one word, but only appears two times. And it's interesting that he used them both in the sense, or within the context, of division—of a split that occurred where people were fighting one another.

In Philippians 2:3 we get a great deal of insight as to what this word means because it is contrasted with vainglory and fighting and strife. Therefore, lowliness is the opposite, it is the antonym of vainglory. Everybody knows what vainglory means. It is pride. It is conceit. It is egotism. It means, literally, "with show." It means, "ostentatious." It just depends on the context it is in. Remember this word lowliness means the opposite. It is the antonym of vain glory.

I'm sorry, but I can't pronounce this word in Greek—lowliness (*tapeinophrosune*). It has fifteen letters in it. I found a word this morning that had twenty letters in it in the Greek, but fifteen is plenty. In the Greek it does not have a kind usage at all. It's a bad word—I don't mean bad in sense of swearing, but if somebody is called lowly, it means that they are groveling. It means they are obsequious. It means they are servile, slavish.

What I get the picture of is a dog and it's crawling toward its master on its stomach. When it gets at its master's feet, it rolls over on its back with its legs going up. You've seen a dog do that. That's kind of what this word means. Lowly, groveling, abject submission.

What Paul did was he took this word and he turned it into a positive usage, because in the Bible, rather than being a bad word, it's a good thing for a Christian to have.

People who are word smiths—you know, you read their word pictures in the Bible—feel that with Paul putting a positive spin on this word, it probably comes closest to the English word "modesty." But, I think that I have found a better one. Even if you look in *Strong's Concordance*, the word strongly implies restraint. Remember this word—**restraint**, holding oneself back. Depending on the context, it implies having a poor opinion of oneself, of ones own powers and faculties.

A person who is lowly, who has lowliness of mind, is very hesitant about trusting himself. It is therefore the opposite of self-esteem and pride, which has such self-confidence and such a high opinion of oneself that it pushes itself forward, whereas a person who is lowly in mind will hold back. He will restrain himself.

The commentators are unanimous in saying that Paul's thought undoubtedly springs from this word being a parallel or a synonym of "poor in spirit" of the Beatitudes. They're not exactly the same word, though. They are parallels of one another. But they say they believe that he used this word because of the strong implications of restraint contained in its meaning, and restraint is a characteristic that is consistent in meekness, patience, and forbearance as well. You put all four of them together and what Paul is saying is that if we're going to have unity it is because everybody is dealing with each other with very great restraint.

"Restraint" literally means, a "stoppage, a check." If a person is being restrained, he is being held back. You hear of people being under restraint. It

usually means the police have hand-cuffs on them or leg-cuffs or something. He is under restraint. So restraint literally means a stoppage, a check, a controlling agency or influence or self-control.

The controlling influence comes from humility. In fact, virtually every modern translation changes this word *lowliness* to humble or humility, thus emphasizing the source or the cause for the restraint. Humility is a more general word, but nonetheless, still correct. Humility is an attitude. It is a perception of oneself in relation to God that reveals itself in the character, in the make-up, in the cast or the manner of the relationship one has with God and men.

What is the outstanding characteristic of humility? It's a willingness to submit. Thus you'll understand why I began the sermon this way, by turning to Ephesians 5:18-21. "Submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of the Lord." So humility's outstanding characteristic is the willingness to submit, and thus, the restraint about pushing oneself forward.

The King James version translates the word there in Matthew 5, in the Beatitudes, more literally as "poor in spirit." This is very helpful because it shows where the restraint springs from. We can just keep taking this back further and further until we really get to the source.

To be poor in spirit is to realize that one *has* nothing, *is* nothing and can *do* nothing. It has need of all things, like the poor. Those who are poor in spirit are very conscious of an emptiness. There is a sense of helplessness. There is a sense of weakness and of worthlessness. It can almost be said to be the flip side of faith. Faith is confidence. Whereas a person with confidence will push himself forward, those poor in spirit will be very hesitant to do so.

Remember all of this is in relation to God. That's where the comparison springs from. But it washes over into relationships with people as well.

If you think of poor in terms of money, you will understand that the poor have little or nothing to give to help. In fact, they themselves feel a need. The till is empty and they are restrained by that literal fact. The same sense comes through poor in spirit and lowliness, except in terms of relationships.

So humility is not the way a person looks. It is an attitude of mind that constrains, i.e., pushes, applies pressure or inclines a person to submit. It is not inherent by nature, and choices must still be made to submit. But the fact that humility exists within a person will be revealed by the choices a person makes despite human nature pulling him in the wrong direction.

Whether you want to call it humility or call it poor in spirit or lowliness of mind, it doesn't come naturally. It exists only because God has revealed Himself and the person, by God's Spirit, has been able to make an accurate assessment of his own worthlessness and need and emptiness, and assesses his real value in relation to God. He is poor. God is rich. What can we possibly give God that He doesn't already have? Us. And so we submit. That's our way. We sacrifice ourselves for Him.

We still must make the choices to submit to Him and this will make us restrain ourselves in our relationships with other people. Thus you will find statements like this one in James 4:6-10, because if the humility is there, the person with it will make the right choices... maybe not all the time, but most of the time.

James 4:6-10 But he gives more grace. Wherefore he says, God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

Do you see that list of choices that James gave to those who are humble to make? If the person is humble, he will do what James says. Every one of them contains a measure of submission within it.

In I Peter chapter 5, we find Peter writing on the same basic subject:

I Peter 5:5 Likewise, you younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility . . .

Those with humility submit. Their dealings with other people are very restrained.

I Peter 5:5-6 . . . for God resists the proud, and gives grace [favor, gifts] to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

It's interesting that Peter said, "...and be clothed with humility," which in the Greek literally means, "...put on the apron of humility." An apron is a symbol of service. He is thinking back to the Passover, the last Passover, where it says Jesus, "took a towel and girded Himself." And then what did He do? He served. See, we're leading to the next area of what humility produces. He says put on the apron of humility. The humble choose to serve. They don't fight—they serve. They don't judge—they serve.

The Bible shows quite a number of men whom I am sure did not look humble on the outside, but in reality (i.e., in the eyes of God) were indeed humble! I'm thinking right now of Moses and David. In one sense there were warriors, both of them. In one sense, powerful political figures, as king and judge. Why were they humble? Because, regardless of what they were, they submitted to God. Regardless of what it cost them, they submitted to God and sometimes they had to give orders or do things that we would consider to be very difficult to do, like in going to war.

In order for one to be humble in the Biblical sense, one must know what is true and right, have a good grasp of reality and then submit to it. Again I remind you of Ephesians 5:21 and Philippians 2:3. Both of these verses show in broad principle what humility tends to do to a person. They are restrained, but at the same time they are constrained to serve and to submit. Those who destroy unity are those who exalt themselves against God, men, doctrines and traditions.

Now back to Ephesians 4 and we'll start on the next of these four qualities. The next three qualities named, meekness, patience and forbearance, receive much of their strength and direction from lowliness of mind.

Meekness is a very complex concept, and no one English word captures the fullness of its meaning. It takes a whole batch of synonyms to describe portions of it. So you will find it translated into quite a number of words in the English Bible. Kindness, gentleness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity (is a modern word), sensitivity to others' needs. There is within this word also the sense of self-restraint. It is not aggressive, insistent, assertive or argumentative.

In some senses it is very close in application to humility. It exhibits a willingness to suffer wrong even though it is right, without insisting on its own rights. Moses was meek. So was Jesus. We want to touch base with Jesus here in Matthew 11:28-30.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke [a yoke is an instrument that gives guidance] upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly [there's the two words together] in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In chapter 12, verses 19 and 20 is an example of the way that He acted.

Matthew 12:19-20 He shall not strive [Jesus was not argumentative, He was not (as you might call it) a fighter, in that sense], nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [that is, lifted up in anger or whatever] in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break [this is showing how gently He dealt with people], and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.

I'll tell you, a person who is meek is an easy person to get along with. They're easily approached. You always know that you will get a fair hearing, a kind hearing, a gentle hearing from these people.

Moses was meek. The way this is stated, here in Numbers 12, and the contrast that is given is very interesting and there is something to learn here. Most of the instruction really comes from the contrast between him on the one side and Aaron and Miriam on the other.

Numbers 12:1-3 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.

Notice the sarcastic pride revealed in the words *only* and *us*. "*Has the LORD spoken ONLY by Moses? And has He not spoken by US?*" That language reveals the pride and the haughtiness of their heart, and the self-seeking and craving for honor that they had.

Now Moses, on the other hand, is described as being very meek. There is an interesting example of this that actually led to him being chided by God for it. But it gives us a good indication of what Moses thought about himself.

Exodus 3:11 And Moses said unto God, Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

He didn't think very much of himself. He had a lowly opinion of himself. And this is all the more remarkable considering who he was and the kind of upbringing that he had. Brought up in Pharaoh's household, a man who was schooled in all the wisdom of Egypt. He probably also had quite an intellect to go with all kinds of other gifts that God had given to him. And yet his thought about himself was, "who am I?" Quite a contrast between his brother and him and his sister and him, who incidentally were not brought up in the same kind of environment that he was. And yet they had the pride. He had the humility. It's kind of interesting...quite a contrast in the depth of the conversion.

Matthew 21:5 Tell you the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes unto you, meek and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

This gives us wonderful insight into our God! HE'S MEEK! That's hard for me to encompass within my puny mind. Here is meekness incarnate, God in the flesh, considering who He was in reality. Humanly we would think of Him either riding in on a magnificent stallion, or maybe in a gilded carriage pulled by magnificent stallions and attended by an army of aides, splendorous in their dress and armed to the teeth.

No, He came riding on a donkey. There's quite a lesson there teaching us why we have to be meek. It's because our God is meek! It's because our Savior is meek! That is a key element to them being at one, and why no strife and why no division ever erupts between them. They have this attitude. If we're going to be in this image, we're going to have this attitude as well.

II Corinthians 10:1-4 Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ [notice the appeal that is here], who in presence am base [lowly] among you, but being absent am bold toward you. [This is the way people were talking.] But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

I read these verses because I want you to see what meekness is contrasted to. Meekness is synonymous to kindness, to gentleness. It is contrasted in this context with competitiveness and being warlike. "For though we walk in the flesh we do not war after the flesh."

What do people do in the flesh? They compete with one another. They make war with one another. Paul is going to make war, as it were, with meekness, with kindness, with gentleness.

Meekness is contrasted with contentious brawling.

I want you to see this context in Titus 3:1-2:

Titus 3:1-2 Put them in mind [instructions to Titus to put the people in mind] to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but [here comes the contrast to speaking evil and brawling, which is strife and fighting] gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

Okay. You should be getting the picture of what meekness is. It is not being competitive. It's not putting yourself all out to win against others and going to war, as it were, to be vindicated and justified. It turns the other cheek. It submits with kindness.

We're going to get another part of the picture here in the book of Galatians 6:1:

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.

What the meek do in order to keep the strife and competition, the brawling and the argumentativeness from coming to the fore, is that they take a good, hard look at themselves and then they treat others with the same gentleness and kindness that they want to be treated with.

If they are directly involved in a dispute these people, the meek, have a very strong tendency to follow what is says in I Corinthians 6:7.

I Corinthians 6:7-8 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? [Suffer loss.] Why do you not rather suffer [or allow] yourselves to be defrauded? No, you do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.

So the meek have a ready willingness to suffer wrong because, after looking at themselves and comparing what God could have done to them and what they are in relation to God, peace and unity are more important to them than appearing to win.

At the same time, they are firm and uncompromising in preserving the truth, but they are not constrained to feel that they must overwhelm you and make their point and defeat you and put you in your place. It is very likely what they will do is simply appeal to you and exhort you to do the right thing.

Those kind of people, the lowly in mind and the meek, are loved by people. They pull people toward them. It almost, you might say, works like magic.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness.

With ALL is what I want to concentrate on here for just a minute or two. It means, "With every possible lowliness," or it can be understood as "with every kind of lowliness," or it can mean "in all situations," or "at all times." In other words, he is saying, always keep the apron of humility on wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whoever the person is you are dealing with, whatever the time happens to be. Never be without it because it is going to serve you and God and unity well. It will never divide. It will always cement and hold the group, the family, the community, together.

These are to be the fundamental elements of our character. We may feel that we have something to be proud of. For some, it might be money. For others, it might be our ancestry. For others, it might be our family. It might be our brains, our looks, our athletic ability, or our understanding of doctrine. So we always have to be careful because human nature is always looking for a way to assert what it is proud of and to display it, and this causes division.

With these two in place, we can go into further manifestations of God's Spirit in us by being longsuffering and being forbearing. That's going to have to wait until the next sermon because my time is up.