

The Church and Politics
Part 4 – United
Hebrews 12:14-15; Ephesians 4:1-7

1. Pleading for unity.

- The walk of unity.
- The ways of unity.
- The work of unity.

2. Power of unity.

- One body
- One Spirit
- One hope
- One Lord
- One faith
- One baptism
- One God and Father

3. Polity of unity.

- *Ephesians 4:14-16*



West Valley Church
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The Church and Politics Part 4 – United

Hebrews 12:14-15 says:

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. (Hebrews 12:14-15)

(1908 was also less than forty years after the civil war. The nation was still wincing at its wounds of social, cultural, and political division.) 1908 was also a leap year. It began at midnight when a 710-pound “electric ball” fell from the flagpole on top of the New York Times building – the first-ever **ball-drop** in Times Square.

It ended 366 days later with a nearly two-and-a-half-hour flight by **Wilbur Wright**, the longest ever made in an airplane.

It has been said that 1908 was the year that propelled America into the modern age.

That was the year that people began to shave with **disposable razor blades** and tidying up their homes with amazing new devices called **vacuum cleaners**.

1908 marked the **Model T** going into production at Henry Ford’s plant in Detroit, Michigan.

American engineers had figured out how to build magnificent buildings known as **skyscrapers** that were being raised across the Chicago skyline—while at the same time they were cutting a **50-mile canal** through the Isthmus of Panama.

On the medical front, Dr. Simon Flexner of the Rockefeller Institute declared in a medical paper that **human organ transplants** would soon be common.

Wireless technology was being developed. Invisible words could now be sent across oceans between giant antennas in a miracle called the **wireless telegraph**.

One magazine daringly predicted in 1908: “When the expectations of wireless experts are realized everyone will have his own pocket telephone and may be called wherever he happens to be. (I think he just described the iPhone)

Everything was happening bigger, better, faster, and stranger than anything that had happened before.

Yet, in the words of Dr. David Busic, one of our General Superintendents, “Something else happened in that remarkable year. It happened in a remote and isolated place called Pilot Point, Texas – just 25 miles from the Red River that borders Oklahoma.

It didn’t make the front page of the New York Times. But in many ways, it was no less remarkable than anything else that happened that year.

On October 13, 1908, the Church of the Nazarene was officially inaugurated in that dusty place.

It was the union of three different holiness groups from around the country to promote the biblical doctrine of holiness as expressed in the teaching of John Wesley and the American Holiness Movement.

While that is certainly true, what is less well known is that at the very same time, **nearly thirty other prominent groups** in America held this same conviction.

So why did these three groups merge to form this denomination, but not the many others?

The three groups that merged at Pilot Point held several common ideas that were essential to their unity:

- The strong affirmation for the ordination of women.
- A baptismal theology that included infant and believer's baptism, and wasn't bound by a specific mode for baptism.
- The willingness to allow for freedom of conscience regarding eschatology (that's a theology of the end times). The early Church of the Nazarene included post-millennialists, pre-millennialists, and a-millennialists.
- A view of divine healing that did *not* exclude modern medicine.

(Several other issues, some of those you might not be familiar with, but you can Google them later. The point of it is,) while many other holiness denominations held exclusive and narrow viewpoints on these issues, the Church of the Nazarene chose to unite holiness people around middle-way (via media) practices.

We have never been at our best as a church when we live in the extremes.

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Pilot Point was that the Church of the Nazarene was able to do what few other evangelical churches could in the divisive years that followed the American Civil War—overcome issues of regional politics, prejudice, and the lingering hatred that follows horrific conflict.

Names like Bresee, Jernigan, and Reynolds (and not long thereafter J.O. McKlurken from Tennessee) came together from north, south, and east to embrace a transformational idea: *Christian holiness can break down any walls of separation.*

Perhaps you didn't know that Jernigan's grandfather was a general in the Confederate army.

And the early Bresee was known to have draped his pulpit with the American flag in solidarity with the union.

Two VERY different people with VERY different social and political viewpoints.

It was a movement of God unprecedented in American church history.

Stan Ingersol (Nazarene archivist and historian), powerfully summarizes the miracle of Pilot Point:

'The union of churches at Pilot Point was a shining example of the social reality of Christian holiness. At the heart of the Christian message is a word of reconciliation: first between sinners and Divine Love; and second, among the members of the human family who are estranged from one another.

Pilot Point signifies the reality that holiness heals hearts and unites people otherwise driven apart by sin, politics, and conflict."¹

The post-pandemic years have been some of the hardest years in recent memory:

- fear
- social concerns
- racial tension
- deeply divided politics

(I can tell you personally that these last few years have been some of the hardest for me as a pastor. It sometimes felt like it's just one "no win" situation after another. So many of us have such heightened sensitivity and levels of anxiety that as pastors we sometimes don't even know where to start. In these political days, every church has self-appointed prophets and political experts being fueled by the echo-chambers of their algorithmic social media feeds.)

(Busic says) I have mostly stopped reading social media – We are to be peacemakers. Something is wrong with a holiness that is constantly contentious. I don't know if our founders (in 1908) had any idea that we would now be a church of 2.7 million members in 164 world areas. Things are a lot more complex than they were in 1908.

In such a time as this, in a world filled with great political strife and extreme polarities, can the Church of the Nazarene return to the spirit of our founders at Pilot Point?²

Busic asks the question somewhat rhetorically, and I believe the answer is yes...but to continue in what God has for us, we must not fight over partisan politics, instead we must fight to maintain our unity in the Spirit – it is the most critical issue we face. Our unity is vital in these times, because now more than ever, with both those celebrating and those grieving over the election outcomes, the community around us needs to see that we are people of the Kingdom of God; that He is real and is with us.

We are going to look at a passage from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesian church.

The church in Ephesus started through Paul – you can read about it in Acts 19. Ephesus was not a Jewish city, so the church was made up of people of all kinds of ethnicities; kind of like us, our community is predominantly Anglo and Latino, among other ethnicities.

The letter is divided into two really clear halves. The first half, chapters 1-3, is all about the Gospel – how all history came to its climax in Jesus and the multi-ethnic community of his followers, called the church.

¹ (Stan Ingersol, "Born In Hope, Borne Onward In Love". A paper delivered June 26, 2017, for the Fraternal Delegates Luncheon in Indianapolis Indiana)

² Dr. David Busic, address to NNU Board of Trustees, 10/11/24, Nampa, ID (on the campus of NNU)

The second half of the letter, chapters 4-6, is about how the gospel should impact every part of how we live our lives. So the first half is the Good News of God's love saving us and making one church out of multiple ethnic groups (again, just like our church will be one church with two languages), and the second half is what it looks like for us to live it out – how we should behave toward each other as the church. It is out of that second part that we want to be instructed today.

The entire book is a powerful statement on what it means to be the church, so I would strongly encourage you to read Ephesians, because it will give you much greater insight into unity. By the way, you won't find anything in Ephesians about church carpet or pews or styles of worship music; but you *will* find things that are *actually* important to our unity. Unity is vital to the church. Disunity is the devil's playground. As soon as believers stop focusing on their unity in Christ and start focusing on themselves and their preferences or politics, the devil is winning, and the church loses. It is imperative that we understand and *practice* unity.

So let me read to you the passage that we are going to look at this morning. It is Ephesians 4:1-7. Would you help me honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it to us?

Paul writes:

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” (Ephesians 4:1-7, niv)

The Bible is very, very clear; if we don't have unity, we don't have a church. So let's make sure we don't miss the point here. Because if we – West Valley Church – can learn and practice what it really means to maintain this unity, then there won't be anything we *can't* do for Christ – Christ will be able to do everything he wants to through us – so that others in our community will be introduced to him and come to faith in him. Please have a seat.

So first, Paul *BEGS* us to have unity; he starts out...

1. ***Pleading*** for unity.

Paul *pleads* – begs – the church to live in true unity. He urges them to live a life worthy of the calling they've received from Christ himself. Here's what he means by that: Christ paid the highest price he could pay to save you – he gave up his life to save you. He did that so that you could have God's Holy Spirit within you, making you holy – making you like Jesus, so you could live like Him. If Jesus gave his very life for you and did all that for you, then, Paul says, unity should be a primary priority for us. The *least* you and I can do is maintain our unity in and under Christ. In fact, it's the *most* we can do, too: it is one of the greatest things.

Then Paul gets even more practical, pointing out some important things to us. First, in his plea for unity, Paul talks about...

- The **walk** of unity.

If Christ is our priority like we say he is, then we demonstrate that primarily *in the ways we treat each other*. Following Jesus in this life takes priority over everything else, and commitment to your church and the unity of your church is the direct result. Listen – others who are not Christians will determine whether or not *they* will follow Jesus by two things in our lives: the consistency with which we live for Jesus, and by the quality of our unity with each other. Those are our priorities. Then, in Paul’s plea for us to walk in unity, he gives us...

- The **ways** of unity.

If you and I are going to walk the walk of unity, then Paul says these four character qualities are the essential ways to maintaining unity, and one of those is that we would be **humble**. It means to humble ourselves by putting God and others ahead of ourselves or our political parties or who is or isn’t in the White House. Be humble.

Next, Paul says that the practice of those in unity is to **be gentle**. The word Paul uses for “gentle” means “an unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind that enables us to bear – without irritation – the faults of others.” That means, if you are irritated with someone or think they’re wrong because they voted for the other side, you will be gentle with them.

Jesus is the best example of this kind of gentleness. If anyone has a reason to be irritated with us, Jesus does. Think about it – we can be so selfish and so sinful. But instead of being irritated with us, Jesus is gentle with us. He expects us to be to each other like he is to us.

The next practice of unity in Paul’s plea is for **patience**. Patience in relationships is an enduring attitude that outlasts any pain we might cause each other. Saint Augustine is credited as saying, “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things: charity.” Let’s be unified in the essentials, let’s grant one another freedom in the non-essentials (like politics), and let’s *at all times continue to love each other*.

Another way of unity that Paul says we must practice is that we would **bear with one another in love**. Another word for this is “longsuffering.” This means that we keep loving and respecting each other, despite each other’s faults and weaknesses and differences. This also means that when there’s conflict with each other, we work to make it right. There is no room for grudges or unresolved division in the church.

The last part of Paul’s plea for unity is that we would do...

- The **work** of unity.

We have a responsibility to be unity-keepers. We are told to *make every effort* to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. That means *it is work*. Every ounce of

energy and effort should be toward the number one priority of practicing unity in West Valley Church. To sow disunity, or to nurse a grudge or disunity in your heart, grieves the Holy Spirit, and folks, grieving the Holy Spirit is as close to the unforgivable sin as you can get. Why would you do that over politics?! Unity does not mean we will always agree, but we *will* always love each other and respect each other and seek the best for each other ahead of ourselves. Sometimes that takes hard work, *but politics are not important* compared to our unity – and *we are commanded to do the work to maintain unity*.

If we worked as hard at this as God commands us to in Scripture, West Valley Church would be unstoppable. Paul pleads for unity because second, there is...

2. **Power** in unity.

The unity that should characterize us powerfully permeates all that we have, all that we are, and all that we do. Because of the powerful presence of God's Holy Spirit in our surrendered lives and church, we have ALL the important things in common, and this is Christian holiness. Paul gives us the "seven ones" – seven things that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have as a church and that make us powerful for his Kingdom. We have:

- ***One Body***. This is the church. In the rest of Ephesians, Paul uses several examples to show this, and the most vivid illustration he gives is in chapter four – that all of us together make up one body connected to the head, which is Christ. With Christ as our head, that means we always do what HE tells us to do. *Always*.
- We have ***One Spirit*** – this is, of course, the Holy Spirit – God's very own righteous presence in our lives and in our unity. We have had the Spirit of God breathed into us by God, so our life and unity is in Him.
- ***One Hope***: this is the sure and certain future that God has promised us. He promises to do great things through the unity of our church in *this* life, and he promises us life together in eternity. We all share in and work toward that unified hope.
- ***One Lord***: This is Jesus; we all share in him, and he shares all things with us. Together with Him as the head, we have life. Our common commitment and allegiance is to Jesus and each other. Period, or we die a headless death.
- ***One Faith***: This means the faith we have in Jesus; faith to believe who he is, that he did what he said he would do for us, and that together in unity he will do what he tells WVC to do.
- ***One Baptism***: This is interesting; it's understood in three different ways, but all are important: first is water baptism; meaning that we've obeyed Jesus' command to be baptized in water into the unified church to show the world what Jesus has done for us (I hope you've been baptized, Christian, but if not: next week at 9am there is a class, and in two weeks a baptism service!). Second is that we are baptized into Jesus' suffering; that we are willing to practice self-denial, to love each other and even our enemies, and to even be persecuted, just like Jesus was. Third, "one baptism" refers to being baptized in the Holy Spirit; that we are completely surrendered to, and allowing ourselves to be completely filled with, the Holy Spirit

who is our unity. This is Christian holiness. We immerse ourselves completely in God – he fills us with the Holy Spirit and by the Spirit makes us righteous, so we can be one body, and we obey Jesus – loving God and loving others – in all things.

- Lastly, we have ***One God and Father***. God and his Kingdom is sovereign and supreme, his power permeates the true church, and his Spirit lives in his people. We have the entire Trinity of God among us!

One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. When we are committed to these seven “ones” we have true, biblical unity. That’s where our power is. No politics are as important as these. There is power in our unity, our commitment to oneness in Christ.

Paul pleads for our unity because that’s where our power is, so explains the...

3. ***Polity*** of unity.

“Polity” means the practices of an organization or community that enables it to function effectively and in healthy ways. Biblical polity is based on unity. Worldly politics are based on division. Paul points out how God has given each of us different spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are supernatural abilities that we use *in service to others*. God gives certain spiritual gifts or abilities to every believer. Spiritual gifts are not for ourselves or our own benefit; they are given to us for the benefit of others. They are given to each of us either to introduce people to Jesus, or to build up other believers. That’s it; only those two things. (Our 103 Core class helps you figure out what yours might be – the next one is after the holidays.) We are unified by each of us putting our gifts into practice, and the church grows through more people coming to faith in Christ and by each of us serving each other. Our common unity is found in our diversity of spiritual gifts; as we each use them, our entire church grows and is healthy. I use mine for you, you use yours for me, and we all use them to introduce others to Jesus. We live in service to others.

Our unity is when each of us serves others in the way each of us can do it, putting into practice the gifts we’ve been given for the betterment of each other.

Unity is who we are. Paul *pleads* with us for this unity because there is *power* in our unity, and points out that the *polity* of our unity is when each of us uses what God has given us to serve each other and those who don’t know Jesus yet.

If you want a great church, don’t focus on politics. I plead with you: be unified to your church. Allow the power of our unity and practice the polity of our unity so that we will grow.

That’s why Paul said something really important that would happen among us when we are unified. It’s in the next section of that passage:

Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 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. (Ephesians 4:15-16, niv)

If you want to grow in Christ, then with Paul, I *plead* with you: live in the power of unity with West Valley Church and practice the polity of unity. It is the only way you will grow, according to the Bible.

Going back to the words of Dr. David Busic, “*(This unity in holiness) was unlikely to happen in 1908, but by the will and power of God, a union was formed.*”

Our founders were not able to do everything, but they have given us hope that we can also deal with the issues that divide us today.

We serve the same God and have the same purpose. This is our holiness legacy. Christian holiness can break down any walls and heal any divides. If it could happen in 1908 it can happen today.

Are the divisions among us too great to hope for healing?

Are our differences greater than our shared hope?

Some would say they are.

But our Founders believed and lived a different story. Hebrews says: Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

(Unity and holiness.) It was the point of Pilot Point and our 116 years as a denomination. It is the point of West Valley Church’s nearly 70 years of existence on this corner, and is the point of what God has for us in the days and years ahead.

Prayer

Benediction:

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21, niv)