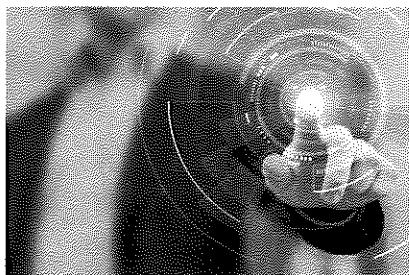


God's Grace for Mutual Growth



Topic

Church growth

Theme

Believers who are active in ministry help foster unity in a local church.

Desired Response

Learners will use their spiritual gifts for the sake of church growth and unity.

Materials

- Visual 19.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 4:1–16

Summary

Paul urged the Ephesian believers to endeavor to protect their unity by cultivating a humble and forbearing attitude and by putting Christian love into action. He explained that the Lord has given gifts to the church for building unity and maturity.

Outline

I. Plea for Unity (Eph. 4:1–3)

- A. Fulfill your calling (4:1)
- B. Consider your approach (4:2, 3)

II. Pattern of Unity (Eph. 4:4–6)

- A. One body (4:4)
- B. One Spirit (4:4)
- C. One hope (4:4)
- D. One Lord (4:5)
- E. One faith (4:5)
- F. One baptism (4:5)
- G. One God and Father of all (4:6)

III. Process for Unity (Eph. 4:7–16)

- A. Gifts for the church (4:7–11)
- B. Growth in the church (4:12–16)

Memory Verses

"Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15, 16).

GETTING STARTED

Use one of the following activities to heighten the learners' interest in the subject of maintaining our unity in the Body of Christ.

Distracted Driving

ASK: When has a distracted driver caused you problems on the road? (Q1)

ASK: What might you say to a distracted driver who puts you in danger? (Q2)

Driving demands full cooperation of hands, ears, eyes, and feet. Distractions lead to danger. Similarly, full cooperation in the church, the Body of Christ, helps keep the Body safe and unified. Paul gave a plea for unity and then gave a long list of patterns for unity that should encourage us to participate in the process for unity.

Simon Says

Appoint a learner to lead the rest of the learners in a brief Simon Says game. After the game, point out that sometimes, like during the Simon Says example, our bodies seem to act independently of our brains.

ASK: What are some instances in which you have felt like your brain and body were not connecting?

ASK: When have you felt like you weren't connecting with someone in your local church body?

Unity in the Body of Christ is vital. Believers can contribute toward unity by actively using their spiritual gifts.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Plea for Unity (Eph. 4:1–3)

Paul plead for the Ephesian Christians to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

A. Fulfill your calling (4:1)

Paul understood godly Christian conduct must spring from within a person. So he did not force godly living on the Ephesians by pulling rank and issuing an apostolic order. Rather, he did the opposite, identifying himself as “the prisoner of the Lord” and writing “I . . . beseech you” (4:1). Paul summoned his readers to practice what they preached, basing his plea on the nature of the Ephesians' spiritual calling (4:1). God called them out of the world and into holiness and the fellowship of His Son. The Ephesians served as Christ's representatives in the world.

Our lives should also be holy, for we too have received a high and holy calling. If the Ephesians heeded Paul's plea and walked worthy of their calling, then they would function as a unified church.

B. Consider your approach (4:2, 3)

Verses 2 and 3 present three personal attitudes and one action that build unity. The first of these is lowliness. Lowliness is humility in a good sense and the opposite of pride and self-righteousness. Proud people who despise others sabotage unity by insisting on having their own way. They cling tenaciously to a petty preference as if this world would fall apart if they let go.

ASK: What are some areas of personal preferences that could endanger church unity? (Q3) *Music style, time and order of service, interior decorating, style of preaching, choice of programs.*

ASK: Why is lowliness essential in church members? (Q4) *Without lowliness, church members will fight for their own preferences, and the ministry of the church will suffer.*

We should have a modest opinion of ourselves. But let's not confuse lowliness with a groveling, demeaning self-concept. Lowliness of mind simply stems from a true realization of one's own unworthiness apart from God's grace. Truly humble Christians do what appears small and unpretentious if that is what God calls them to do. They don't advance their own interests in search of esteem. Conceit and a demand for recognition are diametrically opposed to "lowliness."

"Meekness" (4:2) means "gentleness." Meek Christians are willing to endure wrong without striking back. They renounce violence and self-assertiveness. Jesus taught His disciples to be meek.

READ: John 13:13–15. **ASK:** Imagine you were seated with the disciples and Jesus washed your feet. How might such an experience impact you? (Q5)

The third attitude Paul stressed is long-suffering. Long-suffering is the patient endurance of evils of all kinds. A long-suffering believer is not easily provoked by injustice. Nor is a long-suffering Christian easily angered; he or she is patient with those who offend him or her.

Paul urged the Ephesians to forbear one another in love (Eph. 4:2). Long-suffering is a passive quality—a resigning of oneself to endure wrong treatment. Forbearance, on the other hand, is an active quality; it is love in action. It recognizes value even in the offender.

ASK: What gives believers value, making them worthy of your forbearance? (Q6) *Christ died for the person; the Spirit lives in the person and has gifted the person to serve in some capacity in the church.*

As Christians, we should meet meanness with gentleness and forgiveness. Some would say that if we endure a wrong without striking back, we have done our duty. However, if we endure being wronged but nurture resentment against

the offender, we have not reached the stage Paul described in Ephesians 4:2. Only by truly bearing one another in Christian love can we achieve unity.

READ: Ephesians 4:3. **ASK:** What does the word “endeavoring” suggest about the task of keeping unity in a local church? (Q7) *It involves constant work and effort.*

ASK: What endeavors would characterize a unified church? (Q8) *Praying for one another; practicing proactive communication; dealing with problems as they come up.*

Paul urged the Ephesians to make a determined effort to guard the peace that bound them together in a unity originated by the Holy Spirit.

II. Pattern of Unity (Eph. 4:4–6)

Having urged the Ephesians to cultivate attitudes and actions that contribute to unity, Paul presented a pattern of unity that is basic to Christianity. Verses 4–6 identify seven types of unity that form the pattern of unity.

A. One body (4:4)

First, Paul wrote that there is “one body” (4:4). Believers should try to preserve the unity because there is only one Body of Christ. In Paul’s day, there wasn’t one church for Jewish believers and another for Gentile believers. There isn’t one Body of Christ for some members of a local church and a competing Body of Christ for the rest. Believers have different ages, physical features, and socioeconomic groups, but all are members of the one Body of Christ and all are one in Christ.

B. One Spirit (4:4)

Second, there is “one Spirit.” Some think this wording refers to the disposition of the church. However, the temperament and atmosphere of the church have varied greatly through the centuries. The word “Spirit” in verse 4 refers to the Holy Spirit. He animates and unifies the Body of Christ. From Acts we know the Spirit fell on the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2) and later on the Gentiles at Cornelius’ home (Acts 10). The Holy Spirit resides in all believers.

C. One hope (4:4)

Third, Paul identified hope as a quality that all Christians share. “Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling,” he wrote (4:4). We share this hope because God called each of us unto salvation. We share the hope of being eternally with Christ and of sharing His glory. Titus 1:2 describes it as the “hope of eternal life.”

ASK: What hopes draw unbelievers together? (Q9) *The hope their team will win a championship; the hope their politician will win an election; the hope and anticipation of a holiday.*

ASK: How is the unifying hope of eternity with Christ different than those hopes? (Q10) *The hope is a sure hope; nothing is grander than the prospect of eternity with Christ.*

D. One Lord (4:5)

Paul added that there is only “one Lord,” referring, of course, to Jesus Christ (4:5). All believers belong to Christ. When any member of a local church assumes the role of lord over his fellow church members, he or she usurps the lordship of Christ and disrupts the unity of the local church. When all the members of a local church recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and obey Him, however, unity prevails.

READ: 3 John 9, 10. **ASK:** What was the result of Diotrephes’s claim of the position of lord within his local church? (Q11) *He caused dissension and disunity. He hurt the cause of Christ, particularly the ministry of John.*

E. One faith (4:5)

Fifth, there is “one faith” (Eph. 4:5). Unity of faith refers to the act of faith by which sinners experience salvation. All Christians are saved by the same act of faith—by placing their trust in Christ. There is only one way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

F. One baptism (4:5)

Paul also wrote that there is “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5)—most likely a reference to Spirit baptism. A person becomes a member of the Body of Christ by being baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. Paul taught this truth in 1 Corinthians 12:13. He wrote, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free.”

G. One God and Father of all (4:6)

In verse 4 Paul mentioned God the Spirit. In verse 5 he referenced God the Son. In verse 6, he listed God the Father as part of the pattern of unity. All three members of the triune Godhead are one in essence and equality.

Unity is part of God the Father’s nature in particular. Paul said He is the “Father of all” and “above all.” Furthermore, He shows by being “through all” that He is providential. He does not distance Himself from His creation. Finally, He is present in every believer. Paul affirmed to the Ephesians that God is “in you all.”

ASK: Which of the patterns of unity most compels you to be unified with your fellow believers? Explain. (Q12)

III. Process for Unity (Eph. 4:7–16)

After he provided the theological basis for unity in the church, Paul presented the process by which believers experience unity. He focused first on the fact that the Lord gives gifts to the church to help believers advance together toward spiritual maturity.

A. Gifts for the church (4:7–11)

Even though we are all members of the same body, we have received from the Lord a diversity of spiritual gifts. When properly exercised, these gifts strengthen the unity that exists among members of the church.

Ephesians 4:7 assures us that the Lord's distribution of spiritual gifts extends to every believer. "Grace" in this verse means "enabling." Every Christian has received enabling for service and is accountable to God for how it is used.

In verse 8 Paul quoted from Psalm 68:18, writing that Christ ascended to Heaven and drew behind Him a host of captives, the defeated forces of evil. He also wrote that the ascended Christ gave spiritual gifts.

Christ existed eternally with God the Father before He came to earth and died on the cross. Between the time of His death and His resurrection, Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth (4:9). After His resurrection, He ascended to the Father in Heaven. He went from the highest to the lowest and back to the highest. Thus He filled all things (4:10). As the risen, triumphant, ascended Lord, He gave gifts.

Paul listed some of the spiritual gifts Christ gave, beginning with the gift of apostleship. The apostles, gifted at the beginning of the Church Age, guided the church into sound doctrine. With the completion of the New Testament, the gift of apostleship phased out. Today the completed Bible is our guide.

Christ gave the gift of prophecy to some to both predict future events and announce God's will. Like the gift of apostleship, the gift of prophecy faded once the early church had the Scriptures to use in discerning God's will and understanding His plan for the future.

Third, Christ gave the gift of evangelism. Many with this gift functioned as traveling missionaries. The need for evangelism will always be present, so believers today have this gift. They are skillful at explaining the gospel and helping others learn to be evangelists.

Fourth, Christ gave the church individuals with the gift of pastoring and teaching. "Pastors and teachers" probably refer to the same individual. The word "pastor" means "shepherd." A pastor tends to his flock and teaches the "sheep" the Word of God. The two go together.

ASK: Name individuals with the gift of evangelism or teaching. Praise God for their work. (Q13)

B. Growth in the church (4:12–16)

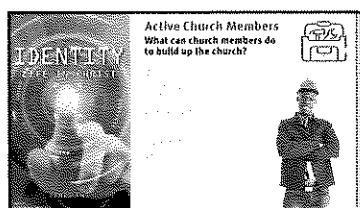
God gives churches evangelists and pastor-teachers "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (4:12). "Perfecting" means "preparing or equipping for service."

ASK: How might a pastor practically carry out his responsibilities? (Q14)

Preach and teach the Word; model evangelism; train individuals to disciples others to be disciplers; clearly communicate the church's Biblical goal of maturity in Christ.

As the pastor and other individuals equip others for service and those believers in turn equip others, spiritual growth occurs, and the Body of Christ is edified, or built up.

DISPLAY: Visual 19—Active Church Members. **ASK:** What can church members do to build up the church? (Q15) *Evaluate their level of discipleship and seek help; identify and hone gifts; use their gifts in the church discipleship process; trains others to use their gifts.*



The spiritual growth process is to continue until all Christians attain a three-fold goal (4:13). First is “the unity of the faith.” A divided church is an immature church. The second is becoming “a perfect man,” a reference to maturity. And the third is “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” or Christlikeness. When these goals are attained, the church won’t be characterized by spinning around, confused by every new or fashionable false doctrine (4:14). The crafty who infiltrate a church to try to draw the members away by cleverness, trickery, and organized false doctrine will look elsewhere for victims.

Paul concluded by saying a mature church will be characterized by truthful actions (“speaking the truth”) that are motivated by love. All members will do their part to conduct truth and confront error from loving hearts to the end they grow up together in Christlikeness (4:15, 16).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Keeping the Unity

ASK: What have you done to endeavor to keep the unity of our local church? (Q16)

Encourage your learners to seek to set aside personal differences and seek reconciliation in love if needed. (Q17)

Getting Active

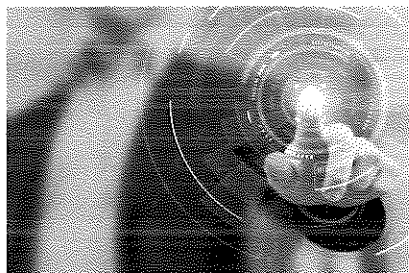
ASK: To what new areas of service might your spiritual gifts apply? Encourage your learners to consider investigating those new areas and asking church leaders for guidance and any necessary equipping. (Q18)

ASK: How might you help others become active in using their gifts in the church? (Q19)

Memory Verses

Encourage your learners to memorize Ephesians 4:15 and 16. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.

Walk with Intention



Topic

Sanctification

Theme

God expects believers to live righteously.

Desired Response

The learner will make any necessary changes to reflect new life in Christ.

Materials

- Visuals 20–22.
- Paper and pencils.

Scripture Focus

Ephesians 4:17–32

Summary

Paul commanded the Ephesians to make a clean break with the sinful habits and attitudes of their unsaved past. He urged them to walk in a way that honors Christ. Such a walk involves a renewing of the mind, a dedication to truth, and a desire to live and speak honestly and compassionately.

Outline

I. The Wrong Way to Walk (Eph. 4:17–21)

- A. Down a dark road (4:17–19)
- B. Away from the light (4:20, 21)

II. The Right Way to Walk (Eph. 4:22–32)

- A. Uprightly (4:22–29)
 - 1. Put off the “old man” (4:22)
 - 2. Renew your mind (4:23)
 - 3. Put on the “new man” (4:24)
 - 4. Demonstrate the new life (4:25–29)
- B. Cautiously (4:30)
- C. Gently (4:31, 32)

Memory Verses

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22–24).