

EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY
EPHESIANS 4:4-10
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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This morning we'll unpack the truths of **EPHESIANS 4:4-10**. But I want us to begin by revisiting **v. 3** for a bit in order to get the challenge Paul gave to us ... **to preserve the unity of the Spirit** ... firmly in mind before heading on into **vv. 4-10**.

EPHESIANS 4:3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Greek word Paul uses for **diligent here** is the word **spoudazo**, which means **to endeavor**, or **to work hard**. And like I said last Sunday, **preserving unity** even within a church, among people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds can be hard –and without the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us, let me tell you what ... it's impossible! And it's not only a challenge in churches, it's a challenge in other ministries, and in Christian schools, and in fact, wherever Christians gather together.

ILLUSTRATION ... During the 14 years I served as the campus pastor at GFU, this was a huge challenge, because I basically had a huge youth group ... but all the students had gone to different churches before showing up at GFU, or they hadn't been in any church –and many of them had different cultural, moral, political, and theological beliefs.

People used to ask me, "What do you do as the campus pastor?" And I'd say, "Students show up at college with their umbilical cords in their hands, looking for a place to plug them in ... and so as the GFU campus pastor, I'm the *Umbilical Cord Placement Director*."

Robin Baker, the president of GFU, knows the challenge and the balance of what I'm talking about –as he tries to keep a single-hearted, single-minded devotion to Jesus Christ while providing leadership for a hugely diverse group of folks. Please remember to pray for Robin as he seeks to live out his calling in the bond of peace –preserving the unity of the Spirit within the GFU flock.

And it isn't much different for us as the church gathered here today. We have such diverse backgrounds ... we've been taught different things by different people ... our theology, our doctrine, and our politics are often very different in a variety of areas. And even as our allegiance is to Jesus Christ, it can take diligence and hard work to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Apostle Paul uses this same root word in **ROMANS 12:11** when he writes ...

ROMANS 12:11 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹¹ **not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**

In this passage Paul is instructing Christians how to love and serve ... and the two words he uses to challenge us about how to live-out our faith with Believers and with people who are not yet in relationship with Jesus Christ are **diligence** and **fervent**.

Diligence means **to do something eagerly ... quickly, and with attentiveness**. So using the word **diligence** to describe how we're to **love**, how we're to **serve**, and how we're to **pursue unity** is the complete opposite of a lazy person who's just kind of strolling along through life without any passion or desire. Instead of being **lazy**, **haphazard**, or **apathetic**, **diligent** people are **charged-up**, **energetic**, **excited**, **focused**, and **putting their whole hearts into** the things God is calling them to put their time, their gifts, and their resources into. They treat the responsibilities God is entrusting them with as priceless and important. And because of this perspective they put a high value on excellence and follow-through. That's what **diligence** is.

The second word Paul uses in **ROMANS 12:11** to describe how Jesus Christ calls us as His followers to **love** and **serve** Him and one another, and how we're to **pursue unity**, is **fervent**. The Greek word for **fervent** is **zeo** and it means **to boil**. And Paul uses this word to describe a man or a woman, a young man or a young woman, a boy or a girl, who is so jazzed about what God has called them to do that they can hardly contain their excitement ... and so they love God and they love others, and they serve God and they serve others, with excellence and enthusiasm. In other words, they're constantly **boilingly diligent** in living out their God-assignments.

How awesome when you and I **live with** one another, **love** one another, and **serve** one another with the **unity**, the **diligence**, and the **fervor** Paul talks about here in **v. 3**. Last week, in **v. 2**, we looked into the words Paul used to describe this **unity** ... and specifically at some of the character traits that show up in us and are lived out through us when we're depending on God to live His life in us and through us ...

EPHESIANS 4:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,**

Are you seeing **humility**, **gentleness**, **patience**, and **tolerance** in your thoughts, in your words, in your deeds, and in how you live out your faith with other followers of Jesus Christ, and with those who don't know Jesus yet? The growth of and the living-out of these fruits in our lives are what we're called to, and will be the tangible, visible evidence and proof of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In **EPHESIANS 4:4-6** Paul tells us what we have in common with one another as followers of Jesus Christ –characteristics God wants to use to unify us, and keep us pointed in the same direction ... loving Him, loving other people, and serving our world. And in these three verses we see a picture of the Triunity of God.

Each of the three members of the Godhead, or what I always refer to as **THE TRIUNITY OF GOD**, has a specific part to play in the unifying of the Body of Christ ... and Paul tells us about these different contributions from the three different members of the Triunity of God in **EPHESIANS 4:4-6** ...

- The main personality of the Triunity in **v. 4** is God the Holy Spirit, Who *transforms* all His followers into one Body.
- The main personality of the Triunity in **v. 5** is God the Son, Jesus Christ, Who *strengthens* all His followers by giving us one faith.
- The main personality of the Triunity in **v. 6** is God the Father, Who *unifies* all His followers by being in us.

[For a thorough teaching on the Triunity of God, go to the **Bible teaching** page of the 2nd Street website (www.2ndstreet.org), and to the teaching on **JOHN 14:25-31** from Sunday, 18 December 2008.]

In **EPHESIANS 4:7-10**, Paul goes on to tell us how each of us as individuals fits into the Body of Christ. I'm so glad I'm a member of the Body of Jesus Christ, which is also called **the Church**. And even though I'm **a member** of the Body of Jesus Christ, I'm also so very thankful that God still sees me as my own person. God loves me the same as He loves everyone else in the Body of Jesus Christ, but He sees me, and blesses me, and rewards me as an individual. And God does the same thing for you.

EPHESIANS 4:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ ***There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;***

Unity in the church **SHOULDN'T** be all that difficult. I mean, if we're being **diligent** to **preserve the bond of peace**, then the rest is easy, since we've already got a common bond with the rest of the people we're in fellowship with. **BUT IT'S NOT ALL THAT EASY**. And if you think I'm wrong, take my word for it ... I'm not. It can be a challenge to **diligently preserve unity in the bond of peace**.

... **There is one body** ... I've often heard my friend Ron Thomason, another pastor-teacher here in Newberg say, that in spite of the reality there are many different Christian *church buildings*, and many different Christian *church denominations* here in Newberg, there's really just **ONE CHRISTIAN CHURCH** here in Newberg. And this is the first thing Paul brings up in **EPHESIANS 4:4-6** in this list of things we have in common as followers of Jesus.

Several years ago I heard Christian sociologist, professor, and author Tony Campolo tell a story to make the point that all followers of Jesus Christ are one Body, but that it can really be a struggle to live this reality out in meaningful ways.

ILLUSTRATION ... A man was walking across a bridge one day and saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So he ran up to the man and said ...

“**Stop! Don’t do it!**”
 “Why shouldn’t I?” he said.
 “**Well, there is so much to live for.**”
 “Like what?”
 “**Well, are you religious?**”
 He said “yes”.
 And the man said, “**Me too! Are you Christian?**”
 “Christian.”
 “**Me too! Are you Lutheran, Catholic or Protestant?**”
 “Protestant.”
 “**Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?**”
 “Baptist.”
 “**Wow, me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?**”
 “Baptist Church of the Lord.”
 “**Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of the Lord or are you Reformed Baptist Church of the Lord?**”
 “Reformed Baptist Church of the Lord.”
 “**Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of the Lord, reformation of 1879, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of the Lord, reformation of 1915?**”
 He said, “Reformed Baptist Church of the Lord, reformation of 1879.”
 And the man said, “**Then die, heretic,**” and pushed him off the bridge.

And in what the Apostle Paul is calling us to, and in this crazy story from Tony Campolo, I see our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

There’s **one Body and one Church**. Everyone in the world is either already part of the **Body of Jesus Christ**, or they aren’t yet part of the **Body of Jesus Christ**. And regardless of the huge differences in what Christians think, believe, and practice, there is just **one Body of Jesus Christ** ... and we need to start living like this is true.

Throughout *The New Testament*, the church is often referred to as “**the body of Christ**.” Two examples of this are found in another one of the four letters Paul wrote while he was in a Roman prison between 61 and 63 A.D. ... the letter to the church in Colossae (which was a 1st-Century city located in what is now modern-day Turkey) ...

COLOSSIANS 1:18a, 24b (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

^{18a} He is the head of *the body, which is the church* ... ^{24b} ... there are things that Christ must still suffer through *his body, the church*.
 [*emphasis added*]

Jesus is obviously no longer physically present here on earth, but He’s commissioned you and me as **the church** to continue His work in the world. We’re His hands and His

arms, we're His feet and His legs, we're His ears and His words, and we're His presence and His compassion in the world. Jesus Christ is the head, directing where we move and what we do ... but you and I as the church are the physical, visible parts as His Body.

When I was a growing up my family loved going to Lincoln City and visiting the Pixie Kitchen restaurant. And then in the late 1960's through the early 1970s we went many times to **PIXIELAND**, the amusement park the same *pixilated* people owned on the north side of Highway 18 about 500 yards before it connects in with Highway 101. You might not have ever heard of **PIXIELAND** because it went out of business and was torn down around 1980 ... wiped from the face of the earth. But it was a place I loved to go to when I was a kid. It was kind of like a Dollar-Store version of *Disneyland*, or about 10 notches down from "*The Enchanted Forest*" just South of Salem on 1-5.

Do you remember putting your face above a headless frame painted to represent a muscleman, a clown, a bathing beauty or some other character? Back in the day, many of us had our pictures taken this way, and the photos are humorous because the head never really fits the body. I thought I had a picture like that from **PIXIELAND** in the mid-1960s, with me, and my older brother Keith. But I couldn't find it. But here's a similar one from Internet with two sisters ... from about the same year.

1960s .JPG PHOTO AT PIXIELAND NEAR LINCOLN CITY, OR



ILLUSTRATION ... That bush needed trimming, but the sign said **PIXIELAND. A Mermaid and a Pixie. Nice marketing strategy ... real heads with creepy, cartoon bodies. Pause with me for a minute and in your mind's eye picture Jesus as the head of our local Body of Believers here at 2nd Street. His head, His face is in the cutout at the top of the picture, and 2nd Street, as a church, is the cartoonish body below.**

Okay, now if the world actually saw the picture you're seeing in your mind's eye would they laugh at it as a silly cartoon misfit, or some kind of sideshow exaggeration? Or if they *really knew our character as a church*, or if they'd *heard about our reputation as a flock*, or if they were *familiar with our actual words and our deeds as the Body of Jesus Christ*, would they stand in awe that a human body could actually be so closely related to a divine head?

Oh friends, how God the Father longs to have His church, our church, His Body, the flock called 2nd Street actually represent the character, the thoughts, the words, the deeds, and the priorities of His Son, Jesus Christ. And having this happen begins with you and me making the commitment to **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**, and with us believing that we're God's hands, God's ears, God's face, God's mouth, God's feet, and God's presence in the world today –

and that for a whole lot of people, you and I are going to be the best, most consistent, up-close-and-personal picture of **WHO GOD IS** and **WHAT GOD IS LIKE**.

Okay, while I was digging around for the picture of my brother Keith and me at **PIXIELAND**, I found a photo of me at about 5-months old that I had to show you. Elvis had nothing on me ... here's me and my hair in the late summer of 1958 ...

GREGG LAMM AND HIS EPIC HAIRDOO IN 1958



Dad and mom ... thanks for the memory ... and for my greased-up, epic pompadour. It was truly stunning! And the **LEFT-ARM PROP UP** ... very creative. You must have used Super Glue or Duct Tape!

Okay, now back to **EPHESIANS 4** ...

EPHESIANS 4:4 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

... **and one Spirit** ... At the moment of our new birth – when we confessed our sins and were forgiven by God – when we were born again and came into a relationship with God, the Holy Spirit plunged us into the Body of Christ, into the Church. And this is another reason that there shouldn't be as many challenges as there are with **unity** within the Body of Christ, because everyone who's been born again has the same Holy Spirit living inside of them. Now of course, there's more than one Spirit in the world ... and in fact, the one true Spirit, the Holy Spirit, warned us about these other evil spirits when He had the Apostle Paul write these words in **FIRST TIMOTHY 4:1** ...

FIRST TIMOTHY 4:1 (NEW LIVING TRANSLATION)

¹ Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons.

In other words, there are many spirits who want to lead us down the wrong paths. But as far as the Body of Christ is concerned, there's only one Spirit we're to be filled us, listening to, and empowered by ... the Holy Spirit, the second member of the Triunity of God. One **body**. One **Spirit**. One **hope**. And it's this same Holy Spirit of the Triune God who also gives us our calling, and then causes His **hope** to bubble up out of that calling. If you use a *Bible Concordance* and look up the word **hope** you'll find all kinds of things we're called to **hope in** and **hope for** as followers of Jesus.

ACTS 23:6

GALATIANS 5:5

COLOSSIANS 1:5

“the hope and resurrection of the dead!”

“the hope of righteousness.”

“the hope laid up for you in heaven ...”

COLOSSIANS 1:27 “the *hope* of glory.”
TITUS 1:2 “the *hope* of eternal life ...”

We read these verses about **hope**, and many more, and at first it can sound like there are many different **hopes** described in the Bible. But when we look at all of these verses about **hope**, we quickly see that they’re all rooted in **one hope**. Gang, one of the doctrines of Christianity that should also **unify** all Believers is the knowledge and understanding that someday, Jesus Christ is coming back to take all of us to heaven to be with Him forever. And this doctrine is what is often spoken of in *The New Testament* as the “**blessed hope**” or the “**great hope of the church**” (cf., **FIRST JOHN 3:3**; **FIRST THESSALONIANS 4:13**).

EPHESIANS 4:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,**

... **one Lord** ... You might remember learning back in **EPHESIANS 1** that the word **Lord** is a respectful title meaning, **master, possessor, and owner**, and that it comes from a Greek root word which literally means **supremacy**. In **REVELATION 19:16** Jesus is called our “**King of kings, and Lord of lords**.” And the very fact that Jesus is given these two titles tells us there are lots of other **kings** and **lords** in this world – and that while Jesus is over all other **kings** and **lords** ... the fact of the matter is that ...

Different people are mastered by, owned by, and in submission to many different things ...

- **To the desire for money.**
- **To an addiction to or a dependence on drugs, food, alcohol, or sex.**
- **To an unhealthy dependence on relationships.**
- **To a quest for fame, or a desire for power.**

And all these things and many more can have **mastery** and **lordship** over our lives. Listen to what Jesus wisely taught about this in **MATTHEW 6:24** ...

MATTHEW 6:24 (J.B. PHILLIPS NEW TESTAMENT)

²⁴ **No one can be loyal to two masters. He is bound to hate one and love the other, or support one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the power of money at the same time.**

Gang, you and I as human beings aren’t wired for divided allegiances. Like Jesus says here, we can only be owned by one master, and we can only have one Lord. And if we desire **unity in the Body of Christ**, it will only come about if our hearts aren’t divided in two by trying to serve other masters. There’s one Lord and Redeemer, and His name is Jesus Christ. And He earned this position as the head of the Church and the Master of our lives by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, and at this very moment, He’s sitting at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven ... where He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

EPHESIANS 4:5 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,**

... **one faith** ... this is referring to the “**measure of faith**” given to you to me when we were born again (cf., **EPHESIANS 2:8**) ... it’s the **faith** Paul wrote about in **ROMANS 10:17** that **grows in us through knowledge of God’s Word**. Believing in **one faith** is a pretty unpopular stance in our world today, as we’re being programmed to accept all faiths as equally true and valid ... just **different** from one another. But the Bible never presents or endorses a generic faith ... and it never says that any other faith is equal to Christianity.

The Bible only validates “**one faith.**” God doesn’t give us the option to choose “the God of our choice”. And it’s only by making the choice to come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that we’re saved from the penalty of sin and born again (cf., **JOHN 3:16; 14:6; ACTS 20:21; 24:24; ROMANS 3:22; 3:26; GALATIANS 2:16; 3:22; 3:26; EPHESIANS 1:15; COLOSSIANS 1:4; REVELATION 14:12**, and many more passages in God’s Word).

... **one baptism** ... Paul isn’t talking here about **water baptism**. What he’s talking about here is the **baptism**, the **immersion**, the **saturation**, or the **cleansing** we experience in the new birth that Paul describes in **FIRST CORINTHIANS 12:13** ...

FIRST CORINTHIANS 12:13 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹³ **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.**

There’s only **one baptism** that makes us members of **one Body**, gives us **one Spirit**, gives us **one hope** of our calling, gives us **one Lord**, and pours **one faith** into our hearts, souls, and minds.

EPHESIANS 4:6 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁶ **one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.**

God is God ... Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism isn’t God, and in fact, he wasn’t even a prophet. God is God ... Allah wasn’t God. God is God ... Buddha wasn’t God. God is God ... Mohammed wasn’t God. God is God ... Confucius wasn’t God. God is God ... L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology wasn’t God. There is only one God and Father. And as we’ve looked at **EPHESIANS 4:4-10** this morning, God has been pounding one thing into us over and over again ... and it brings us to our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** ...

FAITH LESSON

There is only one God.

There is only one way to God. Through Jesus Christ.

There is only one real church.	Jesus is its head.
There is only one Spirit.	The Holy Spirit.
There is only one hope.	When Jesus comes back for His Bride ... His church ... you and me.
There is only one Lord.	Jesus Christ.
There is only one true faith.	Christianity.
There is only one baptism.	Being immersed into Jesus and having His Holy Spirit live inside of us.

To **ACCEPT** these truths is to begin our relationship and fellowship with God. To **REJECT** these truths is to turn our backs on God and choose to live without Him in this life and for eternity.

EPHESIANS 4:7 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

God's **grace** is His **unmerited favor** and His **unconditional love** that takes away our sin. God's **grace** comes to everyone. Having just taught on the **unity of all believers** in **EPHESIANS 4:1-6**, Paul now calls each follower of Jesus Christ to take up the mantle of their own personal responsibility by **servicing** one another in ways that foster **unity** and spiritual maturity. And the way God works **unity**, is through the giving and the living out of the **spiritual gifts** within His Body, the Church.

None of us deserves the **spiritual gifts** God has given us. And if you've never taken the time, or never had the opportunity to discover what your **spiritual gifts** are, you're in luck, because on Sunday evening, 29 August, 2nd Street's *Director of Equipping and Serving*, Chuck Clarkson, will teach our next *Compass Seminar* ... where you can learn about how God has wired you and called you to serve Him, both in His Body and in the world. You can find more information about the *Compass Seminar* on the 2nd Street website, and you can read more about the variety of spiritual gifts God gives to His children in the following passages throughout *The New Testament* ...

ROMANS 12; FIRST CORINTHIANS 12 & 14; EPHESIANS 4; FIRST PETER 4

And now as Paul wraps up this teaching on **unity** and the power of **love** and **forgiveness** as important parts of **understanding grace**, **receiving grace**, and **living out grace**, it strikes a chord in him, and he writes several sentences on a tangent ... and this little rabbit trail in **EPHESIANS 4:8-10** is where we'll spend our last few minutes together in this morning's study.

As Paul thought about where **grace** comes from, and about the fact that Jesus Christ has given us the precious gift of **grace**, it got him thinking about the gift of eternal life that Jesus Christ gave to another very interesting group of people ...

EPHESIANS 4:8-10 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁸ Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." [cf., **PSALM 68:18**]

⁹ (Now this *expression*, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

Paul quotes here from **PSALM 68:18** –and it ties in with what we studied and learned in **EPHESIANS 3:14-15**, that part of the family of God is in heaven right now, and another part of the family of God ... the part you and I are a part of ... is here on earth. When Jesus returned to heaven after His **resurrection** ... which is called His **ascension** ... He gave **spiritual gifts** to the people still living on the earth, and He gave a completely different kind of gift to the people who’d believed in God, but died before the **cross**, the **resurrection**, and the **ascension**.

At the time of Jesus Christ’s **crucifixion**, God-followers weren’t called *Christians*, they were called *Believers*. The price for the sins of mankind ... past, present, and future ... wasn’t paid until Jesus died on the cross, and so all the *Believers* who died before the cross hadn’t gone to heaven yet, but were all waiting in a place Jesus called in **LUKE 16:22** “**the bosom of Abraham**”, which apparently was down in the earth somewhere –like a great underground compartment of some sort.

After His resurrection, Jesus went down into to “**the bosom of Abraham**, and set free the waiting Believers. At His **ascension** back to heaven into the presence of God the Father, all the *Believers* who were waiting for the cross in **the bosom of Abraham** ... no doubt, millions of them returned with Him to heaven. This is what the “**ascended / descended**” language of **PSALM 68:18** and **EPHESIANS 4:8-10** is referring to.

Many other things happened when Jesus was **resurrected**. After He went down into the **bosom of Abraham** and set the captive Believers free, we read in **MATTHEW 27:52-53** that some of these ransomed *Old Testament* Believers, received their bodies back, came back out of their graves, went into Jerusalem, and appeared to people between Jesus’ **resurrection** and **ascension**. *Zombie Evangelism*.

Like Lazarus (cf., **JOHN 10-12**), these people all eventually died again, but when they did (because they were now on this side of the cross), they went directly into the presence of God in heaven, the way Believers do today. I’ll get into a deeper teaching on this when I teach through *The Gospel of Mark*, beginning in January 2011. So that’s kind of a sneak preview of coming attractions! **EPHESIANS 4:11** takes up where **EPHESIANS 4:8** left off, and is where we’ll pick up in our study next Sunday.

NEXT SUNDAY ... EPHESIANS 4:11-16 ...

This morning we’ll look at the difference between *fate* and *destiny*, what it mean to “become mature in our faith”, and at some of the ways we can tell if we’re moving toward maturity in Jesus Christ.

COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!

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