

December 11, 2005 by Steve Brandon



# Do You Unify The Church?

## Ephesians 4:1-3

- 1. Unity requires a worthy walk (verse 1).**
- 2. Unity requires a lowly walk (verse 2).**
- 3. Unity requires a diligent walk (verse 3).**

Over the past few weeks, we have been in a topical sermon series on the church. My aim in this series has been to remind you afresh of what the church of Jesus Christ really is. It's my desire to stir within you a love for the church, because you know the church and you desire to build the church through serving. I have attempted to show you how much God loves the church: He died to purchase it. I have attempted to show you how much God communicates through the church: It is through the church that God's manifold wisdom has been made known. I have attempted to show you God's goal for the church: maturity, which comes through service.

My sermon titles have reflected these goals. They have been in the form of questions: Three weeks ago, I asked the question: "Do You Love The Church?" (from Ephesians 5:25-27). Two weeks ago, I asked, "Do You Know The Church?" (from Ephesians 3:8-11). Last week, it was, "Do You Serve The Church?" (from Ephesians 4:12-16). This week, my question is similar: "Do You Unify The Church?" Our text for this morning's sermon is Ephesians 4:1-3. This title is a bit difficult, because Ephesians 4:3 says that there is already a unity in the church. We didn't do anything to create this unity. It was created when Christ died upon the cross. However, we can destroy the unity. And so, when I ask, "Do You Unify The Church," I don't mean that you create the unity. But rather, that you maintain the unity.

Perhaps you have noticed that every single sermon that I have preached has been loosely based from a passage in Ephesians. It's no accident that every single one of my sermons has been loosely based in Ephesians, for Ephesians is a book that is all about the church. One commentator said that one of Paul's main purposes in writing Ephesians was "to picture God's glorious redemptive grace toward the church." [\[1\]](#) Another commentator wrote that Paul focused his attention upon "God's overall design for his church and for his world." [\[2\]](#) I remember listening to a series of sermons from a pastor whose church was going through a building program. While going through this program, he chose to exposit the book of Ephesians, as he knew that it would help the people of the church to focus on the real meaning and purpose of the church. He feared that they might be distracted by the bricks and mortar going up all around them, to think that those things represented the church. And so, it was the book of Ephesians that continually helped the church to focus their attention upon the church.

One of the grand themes that arises in this book of Ephesians is the theme of unity. It is for that reason, that I want to continually ask you this question: "Do You Unify The Church?" Consider our text this morning:

Ephesians 4:1-3

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

God values unity in the church. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed several times for the unity of those who would come to believe in Him. Jesus prayed, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). Jesus prayed, "I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity" (John 17:23). God values unity in the church. When the church is unified, it is a blessing to all of us. It is something that we all must seek. Psalm 133:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity." We ought to value unity in the church as well.

My first point this morning is that ...

1. Unity requires a worthy walk (verse 1).

You see there in verse 1, that Paul exhorts those in Ephesus to "walk in a manner worthy of [their] calling." Paul simply means that the way that we live ought to match what God has called us to be and to do. This compels us to look back in the book of Ephesians to see what exactly Paul was talking about when he describes our calling. We see this also with the word, "therefore." This word tells us that verse 1 is a conclusion of what followed. It may be simply be a deduction made from the previous verse. Or, (as in this case), it may be a conclusion made from an entire series of thoughts.

Let's review the book of Ephesians (at least chapters 1-3). Paul begins in chapter 1 with a description of how God has called us. In verse 3, we are told that God is to be blessed, because He has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Is there a blessing in heaven to give to you? You have received it! Is there something that God may do for you that would be a blessing to you? God has already done it!

And then, in verses 4-14, Paul goes on a rampage to describe our wondrous salvation. It was initiated long ago in heaven. If you are in Christ this morning, please know that before the world was ever created, you were chosen to be one of His children. God "chose us in Him before the foundation of the world!" (verse 4). In verse 5, we read that "God predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself."

This means that our salvation is all of the grace of God! He is the one who determined it, long before we came into being. That's the point of verse 6, which speaks of the end result of our salvation. It is all "to the praise of the glory of His grace."

The blessings that God has given us continues on in verse 7, where we are told that "we have redemption through His blood, [which is] the forgiveness of our trespasses." This means that all of our sin is washed away. We go free! We no longer face the wrath of God! Do you have any idea of how great a blessing that is? We don't have to walk around with a dark cloud over us! We can experience joy, knowing that our Father has been gracious to forgive us of our sins! At the end of verse 7, we read that God has done this, "according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us" (verses 7-8). The picture that is given here is that of a spring of blessings of God's grace that seemingly never stop! They keep coming and coming and coming and coming! His grace is lavished upon us!

Furthermore, we have the blessings of knowledge in verse 9, "He made known to us the mystery of His will." God has told us of His plan of grace in our lives! God has told us of His plan to work itself out in the church. The end of this will comes in verse 10, "the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth." The entire history of the world is headed someplace. It is headed to a completely unified, finished, perfect gathering of all things in Christ. The redeemed in Christ will be perfect (Rev. 21:27), never sinning again. They will be consumed in worshipping the Lamb, who was slain (Rev. 5:12). All will marvel at the beauty and perfection of the New Jerusalem. The gates made of pearls (Rev. 21:21). The streets made of gold (Rev. 21:21). God, Himself, giving light to the entire city!

The blessings continue to abound in verse 11. We have "an inheritance" that we neither worked for, nor deserved. We are children of God, adopted by Almighty God Himself (which as back in verse 5!). In adoption, parents selects a child and bring the child into their home, declaring the child to be a full inheritor of their home. That's what God has "predestined" for us! (verse 11). That's what God has insured by "sealing" us in the Holy Spirit, guaranteeing that the day of redemption will come for us!

The blessings go on and on! In fact, these blessings are so big, that Paul prays that we might know them! Look at verse 18. Paul writes, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (verses 18-19). In other words, the hope of your calling is so great, that you can't even know it fully by yourself. I am praying that God may teach you what a great hope you have because of His calling of you. I am praying that God might teach you of the riches that await you when you finally receive your inheritance from God. I am praying that God might teach you of the abounding power of God that is directed toward us!

By the time that Paul arrives in chapter 2, He is still speaking about the amazing power of God in redeeming us. In the very first verse, we read that "you were dead in your trespasses and sins" (verse 1). But, God resurrected you out of your dead state. Verse 5 says that God "made use alive together with Christ ... even when we were dead in our transgressions." God has saved us by His grace (as verse 8 mentions). God has saved us in such a way as to entire prohibit all boasting in ourselves! And then look at verse 10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (verse 10).

God doesn't save us by our works. However, God saves us and appoints us to perform the works that He has prepared for us to do. And in this verse, you ought to begin to get a sense of what is going on in chapter 4, verse 1, where Paul speaks about "walking in a manner worthy of [our] calling." What is our calling about? It is all about God's grace, come into our lives. How might we walk appropriately before others? By living lives of grace before others. Verse 2 begins to get into some specifics of how exactly you do this, ... "... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love." That's living a life of grace! ... But, we aren't there to verse 2 yet. We are still in verse 1, giving the background to this worthy walk.

One of the things about the worthy walk is that it isn't done in isolation. No, the worthy walk, must be done in community. And this is how Paul continues in chapter 2. Consider the following verses:

Ephesians 2:13-18

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both [groups into] one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

This is where I get the connection of unity and the worthy walk. My first point is simply that "Unity requires a worthy walk" (verse 1). In these verses, Paul is describing the makeup of the church. It is made up of both Jews and Greeks, dwelling together in the "one new man" of verse 15. It is made up of two differing groups of people, who have been reconciled through the cross of Christ into one body! (verse 16). Our access to God is no different. Jews and Greeks alike have the same access to God, the Father (verse 18). There is only one foundation of the church and that is Jesus Christ (verse 20). It's not two groups co-existing. It is two radically different groups of people, living in harmony with one another. Chapter 3 continues to pick up on the unity that we have in the church. Look at verse 6, "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." God has made two groups made into one (2:14), living in love with one another.

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Let's look at how to have a unified walk. It comes in verse 2, "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love," I'm calling this point, ...  
2. Unity requires a lowly walk (verse 2).

Paul raises many attitudes and actions that we need to have if we are to be unified as a church: humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance,

and love. I have simply tried to summarize them all under the title of "lowly." I thought about using "humility" or "love" for they represent the entire list as well. However, each of these words were part of the list themselves and might prioritize them in your thinking. And so, I decided to use this word, "lowly," as it fairly represents the idea behind all of these words. Let's just spend a few moments thinking about each of these attitudes:

**Humility.** This attitude speaks of a lowliness of mind that doesn't think highly of oneself (Romans 12:3). This attitude loves to speak highly of others, but not of oneself! Humility doesn't act selfishly, but rather regards others as "more important than himself." This is the attitude of John the Baptist, who pointed to Jesus and said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

**Gentleness.** This attitude speaks of meekness, softness, and tenderness. The gentle person is the person who speaks softly and with great care and concern in his voice. This past week, my family went to the hospital to visit a woman in our church, who just had a baby boy. When we told Stephanie, my two year old, that we were going to go and see a newborn baby, she said, "Careful." This is gentleness -- it treats others like a newborn baby.

**Patience.** This attitude speaks of one who takes a long time to get angry. (This is literally what the Greek word means). The Greek word is *makroqumia* (*makrothumia*), which is a combination of two words. *Macro* means "long" (as in "macro," big!). *Thumia* means "passion, feeling, anger." When you put these two things together, you see the picture of someone being provoked, but remaining calm, cool, and collected in the storm. Patience is like an oven, taking a long time to heat up.

**Forbearance.** This word speaks of one who endures under great pressure without breaking. The picture is of one standing under a load of weight, but not cracking or falling down. Imagine a weightlifter, with a 500 pound barbell which he is holding above him for a long time. This is "forbearance."

**Love.** We hear much of this word. We all know what it means. It means having an affection for another person. It means a focus upon the well-being of another, because your happiness is bound up in their happiness.

"Do You Unify The Church?" In order to do so, we all need to be characterized by these qualities. We need to be humble, holding others in honor. We need to be gentle, caring for others as we would a baby. We need to be patient, waiting for a long time before being provoked. We need to be forbearing, enduring under difficulties without breaking. We need to be loving, having affection for others. Or, as I have chosen to say it, "Unity requires a lowly walk." These are the things that we need to have demonstrated in our lives if we are to preserve the unity of the church.

The book of Proverbs abound with such wisdom. "A **gentle** answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the **slow to anger** pacifies contention" (Proverbs 15:18). "Hatred stirs up strife, But **love** covers all transgressions" (Proverbs 10:12). It works like this: There is some problem and difficulty between two people. If people are proud or quick tempered or unloving or not patient, then the tension and the difficulty will escalate. "An arrogant man stirs up strife" (Proverbs 28:25). "An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22). But, if people are lowly, and looking out for others in patience, humility and love, the tensions will die down. "The beginning of strife is [like] letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out" (Proverbs 17:14). "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel" (Proverbs 20:3). Tensions in relationships will create disunity. However, when tensions die down, you can begin to work toward unity. That's why these attitudes and actions are so important in our lives.

I want for you now to think about your relationships with others in this church. Are they characterized by a humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love? Perhaps there is somebody here in the congregation with whom you have had a disagreement. Words have exchanged between you. They have acted in such a way that has caused tension between you and them. They have said some things that have been hurtful to you. Perhaps you have returned the favor. It has had an effect upon your relationship. Whereas you once used to be genuinely excited about seeing this particular person, now you are simply cordial. When you come to church, and they happen to be gone that day, perhaps a little part of you rejoices that you don't have to deal with them.

Such experiences are normal. When metal rubs against metal, this friction produces heat. When sinners rub close against other sinners, the friction produces heat. With metal, you need oil to dissipate the heat. With Christian relationships, you need the oil of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. We are called to actively pursue unity among each other. Verse 3 (of Ephesians 4) calls us to "be diligent" to pursue this unity. It calls for an active pursuit.

To keep the unity in Ephesus, these things were desperately needed. Just think about how the church in Ephesus began. Acts 19 records the story of how Paul came to Ephesus with the gospel on his third missionary journey. As was his custom, he first entered the synagogue in Ephesus to proclaim to the Jews that their Messiah had arrived! For "three months," he reasoned with them and persuaded them about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). As a result of his preaching, some of the Jews in the synagogue "were becoming hardened and disobedient" (Acts 19:9). So, Paul took the believing Jews and began to teach them in the "school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9). This was a school hall that Paul rented in Ephesus, where both Jews and Greeks could hear the gospel (Acts 19:10). For a period of two years, Paul proclaimed Christ in this place. Many of the Jews came to a greater understanding of the gospel. Many Gentiles became obedient to the faith.

I love the story of what took place in Ephesus! Ephesus was the home of the great temple of the goddess Artemis. So great was this temple that it has been called one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was the pride of Ephesus. It brought much money and commerce to Ephesus, as people would travel great distances to worship their idols there in that temple. There were those who made their living, working in the temple. There were those who made their living, making idols to be sold in the temple. And yet, in this city, revival took place! There were quite a few idol worshipers who turned from their wicked ways to serve the living and true God! What took place in Ephesus was nothing short of a miracle!

There were quite a few people in the city, who were trained in their magic arts. And "many of those who practiced magic" in Ephesus were

converted (Acts 19:19). As a demonstration of their repentance, those converted brought their books into the public square and began to burn them all in the sight of the whole town. So great was the pile of books that Luke records how much the books were worth. They were worth 50,000 drachmas, which is equivalent to 50,000 days wages. That's like \$5,000,000 of books! It was quite a statement of their conversion. All in the city were quite aware of what was happening in the city, as they saw the smoke ascend and began to inquire as to what was burning! These magicians had turned to Christ and had denounced their ways. It had a great effect upon the city itself. It caused the idol makers to hate those who had converted to Christ, because it was affecting their business (Acts 19:25).

But now, catch the difficulty that the church in Ephesus would experience. The Jews and the Greeks in this city, who had come to faith in Jesus, were from entirely different cultures. The Jews were those who were trained in the ways of God from their youth. They learned the Scriptures at a young age, being able to quote large passages of Scripture from memory. Every Sabbath, they heard the law taught and expounded in the synagogue. Every Sabbath, they spoke and sang words of praise to God. You might equate the Jews to "church kids," who know nothing other than a protected life in the church (which is a great blessing)!

The Gentiles on the other hand, were entirely different than this. They came from a culture that was trained in the way of their idols! Not only was their theology wrong, but their morality was equally wrong. They would have engaged themselves in many sinful activities! You might equate these Gentiles to "gang members," who know nothing of the practice of righteousness.

And now, imagine these two sorts of people mixing in the church. Their backgrounds were entirely different. They had differences in the way that they talked. They had differences in the way that they dressed. They had differences in the manner in which they were accustomed to living. But, now, they had come together to live in the church in Ephesus. The church in Ephesus must have been a sight to see! They would have easily provoked one another.

What these Ephesians experienced was really not much different than what many churches in the first century would have faced. The church in Corinth would have been like this. The church in Thessalonica would have been like this. The church in Psidian Antioch would have been like this. Jews and Gentiles living together. In fact, down through the ages, churches have always faced this sort of diversity to one extent or another. Some churches are more diverse than other churches, but all have some semblance of diversity.

With great diversity comes great opportunities to demonstrate humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love. So, how are you doing in seeking this unity? Joshua Harris puts it well when he wrote, ...

I came across a book by a young Christian author who shared his story of finding God on the open road. He and a buddy packed up for a road trip and hit the highway in search of God. His pastor at home just didn't seem to understand his longings for spiritual depth, so he left everything familiar behind and headed out for adventure.

It made for an interesting book. There's definitely something appealing about striking out and discovering God. It sounds spiritual and courageous. But I don't think it's what God's Word prescribes for spiritual growth. And ultimately I don't think it's as spiritual or as courageous as it might appear.

Going away is easy. Do you want to know what's harder? Do you want to know what takes more courage and what will make you grow faster than anything else? Join a local church and lay down your selfish desires by considering others more important than yourself. Humble yourself and acknowledge that you need other Christians. Invite them into your life. Stop complaining about what's wrong with the church, and become part of a solution.

It's so simple and yet so life-changing. Life lived in a local church is an adventure that will lead to more joy and more spiritual depth than you can imagine. It might not make a bestselling memoir...but it's the story God loves to read. [\[3\]](#)

Did you know that unity in the church is evangelistic? As the church lives out its unity, the world looks on. As unity is modeled, the world has an opportunity to witness the transforming effect of the gospel in your lives. Jesus said it this way, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35). Unity in the church is radical. The world will take notice when those in the church genuinely love one another. Such love will produce a unity that the world can only explain as divine.

This is how God has composed the church. It is a place where Jews and Gentiles and whites and blacks and poor and rich and gifted and ungifted may dwell together in unity, and thereby, showing the power of the gospel to transform lives! But, in order to achieve this unity, we need to have a lowly walk. Let's direct our attention to my third point this morning.

### **3. Unity requires a diligent walk (verse 3).**

This comes in verse 3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I focus your attention here upon the words translated, "being diligent." The NIV translates this, "make every effort." The KJV translates it, "endeavoring." The ESV translates it using the word, "eager." The New English Bible reads, "spare no effort." You combine all of those together and you get the sense of the word. It describes a persistent, conscious, effort. It describes work. It describes labor and toil. It describes design, intent, purpose.

Unity in the church doesn't simply "happen." Unity in the church "happens" just as your children's rooms just "happen" to stay clean. Unity in the church "happens" just as dust just "happens" to stay off your furniture. Unity in the church "happens" just as falling snow just "happens" to stay off your sidewalk and driveway. Unity in the church "happens" just as your body just "happens" to smell nice apart from bathing. Without a conscious effort, the unity of the church will not be preserved. That's what verse 3 says.

Lest you think that all of my talk of unity is throwing doctrine out the window, please think again. Verses 4-6 are filled with beliefs that unite

us: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

It is the **one Spirit** that works in us! (The third person of the Trinity). We could never have this unity with Jehovah's witnesses or with Mormons, who deny the Trinity. It is **one hope** of our calling! (We hope for the glories and pleasures of heaven). We could never have this unity with liberals, who doubt whether or not the promises of the Bible are really true! It is **one Lord**! (We submit ourselves to the sovereign rule and reign of our master). We could never have this unity with those who believe that submission to the Lordship of Christ is optional for salvation. We are unified, because we are all under One master, as Peter calls Him, "the Chief Shepherd" of the church (1 Peter. 5:4). It is **one faith**! (We believe in the substitutionary atonement of Christ's sacrifice). We could never have this unity with those who believe that your works help to merit your salvation. It is **one baptism**! (This is probably talking about conversion, when the Spirit comes and creates you anew, which happens once!) We could never have unity among those who believe that you can be saved and then be lost and then be saved and then be lost. No, there is one baptism of the Spirit for salvation. It is **one God and Father of us all**! (We believe in one God, not many gods). We could never have this unity among polytheists or idol worshipers (of which there were many in Ephesus).

And so, I'm not talking about a wishy-washy love and commitment to one another. I'm not talking about obtaining unity for the lowest common denominator. In fact, doctrine is a unifying thing. But, I am talking about loving others despite our differences. And we can have various differences of opinion about things. Paul dealt with this in Romans 14 and 15. He dealt with those who had different convictions about what was permissible to eat and what was not permissible to eat (Rom. 14:2-4). He dealt with those who had different convictions about the Sabbath, whether or not it was still in effect (Rom. 14:5-6). It is very interesting how Paul counseled the church in Rome. He didn't tell them to lower their standards. He didn't tell them to lighten up. No. He told them to keep their convictions. But, he told them not to allow their convictions to disrupt the unity of the church. He said it like this, "Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. ... Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food" (Rom. 14:5b, 19-20a). The way to do this is to keep your walk lowly: humble, gentle, patient, forbearing, loving. It takes work. It doesn't just happen. It means talking to others. It means praying for others. It means confessing sin to one another. It means serving one another.

Let me give you a real-life example of someone "being diligent" to preserve the unity in the body of Christ. Last Sunday, we prayed for an Israeli woman, who is a friend of someone in the church. Through an unbelievable story, she and her husband were amazingly converted here in the United States when they both witnessed an amazing change of her father. Anyway, she was going to travel into Jordan with a handful of other women. Now, having been to Israel and to Jordan, I can tell you that I don't want to go into Jordan again. It was not a particularly pleasurable time. You could feel the tension in Jordan that exists between Jordan and Israel. There is no love lost between the Jordanians and the Israelis. I remember going to purchase something in Jordan. I made the mistake of seeking to pay with Israeli money. When I offered some shekels to the cashier, he seemed a bit upset at me, like I had just insulted him. They won't take Israeli money, because of the legitimacy of the Israeli nation that it would force them to acknowledge.

So, I can't imagine why in the world a Jewish woman would want to travel into Jordan. I can't imagine why several women would want to travel into Jordan. But, having received an email that she wrote to one in our church, I now understand why it was that she went into Jordan. One of her purposes in traveling to Jordan was to show how unified the body of Christ is. She was "being diligent" to demonstrate unity within the body of Christ. Listen to what she wrote. ...

Thank you so much for your prayers. It made me and the other girls feel so safe. ... We are thankful that God blessed this conference. We were 23 women. Five Arab women from Israel. Six Palestinian women from Beth Lechem. The rest were Jewish women. So it was half Jewish and half Arabs.

It was taken place in Jordan because the ones from Beth Lechem are not allowed to get into Israel free. We arrived to Petra Jordan on Friday night. Saturday was a testimonies getting to know one each other and Bible study. The bottom line of this day was in both sides Jewish and Palestinian there are sinners. Both sides make mistakes. We need to realize that we are one in Christ and to love one each other.

Sunday we got into Petra city. I don't have enough words to describe it's beauty. It is the most beautiful place that I ever saw. What a privilege to know that God is the creator. That God made all these beautiful colors of stones. The all city is pink and red. huge rocks and mountains all red. We spent the all day walking in Petra (you can spend 3 days in). ... In the evening we had a Bible study (which I was teaching) on 1st Corinthian 13 4-7. I am glad that the women were with me and not too tired.

Monday was interesting we had started with a study and in the second session we got news from Israel: A terrorist had blown himself in Natania town. The woman who organized this conference is from Netania. ... And we were all worried for her family. What happen in kind of this situation is that all the lines of the phone "fall" because every one tries to call the same area. We had stopped to pray and it was moving to hear the Arab-Palestinian ladies praying for Israel for the wounded people for the families. Telling us how sorry there are of the terrorism. Lisa's family are fine so are the Christian from her church. But 5 people got killed and 35 wounded.

It was a whirred [i.e. wierd] situation sitting Jewish and Palestinian women studying together the Bible about loving each other and putting it all behind us. Our guide was a Jordanian guy. He said that for the first time he cared to hear about what happened in Israel and cared for [this woman's] family. After lunch we went to the village. It was interesting to met the Jordanian people that set in their stores. We spent 4 hours just in between four stores because we set talking to them about Jordan and Israel and our conference since they couldn't understand how come that Jewish Israelis are walking together with Palestinian.

In the hotel we got response as what an amazing group: Arab Israelis (Arabs that live in Israel) Palestinian and Jewish

women all together and love each other so much. One of the older Palestinian women said that she never knew till now that there are Jewish Christian women. She came to me and my friend ... and said that now that she knows that we will be with her in heaven she is willing to die any moment. It was her way to say she loves us. She also kissed us any time we passed by. We were praying also for the Jordanian people that we met around. There are all Muslims. It was interesting that through all these days we didn't see even one Jordanian woman. In the hotel and in the village only men.

For the future, ... we are going to be in one of the Arabs villages in the Galilee to celebrate Christmas with their church. We will try to get together and bring the message to the churches of being one body and both sides have one mission to bring the gospel to the non-Christian around -Jews and Muslims. God was glorified in this conference. Your prayers kept us and warmed our hearts.

On the way in and I felt not comfortable but I had remembered your words: God can put that barrier up between the enemy and you as you drive and we will pray for that. He can blind the eyes of those who want to harm so they won't even see you on the road in your cars.

We serve such a great God and this is an honorable trip that you are taking. Thank you for these words. It helped me so much knowing again and again what a great God we serve.

This Israeli woman knows what it means to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." She went to great lengths to foster the unity that we have in Christ. She went outside of her comfort zone. She placed herself in a dangerous situation, because the unity of the body is worth it. Will you do the same?

Surely, it's different for you and for me. We don't need to face danger in order to preserve the unity at Rock Valley Bible Church. Perhaps we need to face something far more difficult: our pride. Our willingness to be humble and gentle and patient and forbearing and loving, even to those who don't seem to be so lovable.

Now, what about Rock Valley Bible Church? Where is the unity at Rock Valley Bible Church?

Let me be very honest with you, this past year has been a very difficult year for Rock Valley Bible Church. We have had several issues rise to the surface this past year, which have divided our body. Our first issue this year was our involvement in missions. Steve Belonger and I returned after an excellent trip abroad. There were those in our body, who thought that we shouldn't be involved in world missions at this time. There were others who believed very strongly that we should go forward, without any reservations at all!

As a pastor, it was very difficult to tread the waters and to seek unity among us. I had many conversations with people in this church about these matters. We had several meetings with those in the church who represented opposite sides on this issue. In the end, we have chosen to continue forward with our efforts. In doing so, I know that we haven't satisfied everybody. Some still tell me that we are going too slow with our efforts. Others still have some concerns about it.

I simply say that we have charted a path of involvement in worldwide missions that seems consistent with the Lord's leading and our own unity. I simply ask you to be diligent to maintain the unity of the church in this regard. Be supportive of the leadership of this church. Note that this is far different from saying, "Be supportive of what Steve Brandon and what he wants to see happen abroad." Because, to tell you the truth, our involvement in missions at this point is different than what I want to do, personally. My heart is to go full steam ahead! My heart is to do all we can right now! But, having surrounded myself with the wisdom of many counselors, who have far more missions experience than I have, I have gladly submitted my plans to their wisdom from the sake of unity in the church. We, as an elder and deacon board, are united in our current missions direction. We are praying about our next trip.

In the summer, there was another issue that arose in our church. A man was presented before you as a possible candidate to come on staff at Rock Valley Bible Church. From my perspective, this guy would have been a great help to me. His musical gifts were obvious for all to see. His heart for ministry was great. He could have freed up my time administratively to focus upon the pastoral work to which I have been called.

As we worked through this issue as a church, it was clear that there were differences of opinion as to what Rock Valley Bible Church needed at this time. Did we need a young, single man with musical abilities? Or, did we need an older man who has been seasoned with life? I had many conversations with people about these things. I had many meetings with people about this issue. The leadership team received letters about this issue.

Ultimately, through the leading of his own heart and the leadership of this church, it was determined that this wasn't the time for him to come on staff. Is this what I wanted? Not hardly. I shed tears from this pulpit during his last Sunday among us, knowing how he could have helped this church. But, I tell you, for the sake of the unity of Rock Valley Bible Church, I have gladly set aside my wishes for the greater good of the body. I value the unity at Rock Valley Bible Church and am seeking to be diligent to uphold it, even when I am disappointed with the outcome.

Please note that had we been congregational rule, both of these issues would have turned out different. I'm quite sure that we would have mustered enough votes to continue on exactly as I have personally wanted to do. But, in doing so, such actions would have created a disunity among us that would have had its long-lasting effects. I am grateful to God for His leading in both of these instances. Though it's not what I want, it is best for the unity of the church. It is better to back off of these issues than it is to go forward as a fractured church. I believe that God will bless our decisions in the future.

A few weeks ago, someone told me that the way that things worked at Rock Valley Bible Church is to figure out what Steve Brandon wants to do (as the preaching pastor) and simply support him in these regards. Such a view of the church couldn't be further from the truth. I have

placed before you several issues that have turned out differently than I have wanted. And yet, the church is unified. I could give you other examples of things that I have wanted to proceed with as a church, but have been stalled, because there hasn't been unity among the elder and deacon board. I'm fine with that. I have even come to embrace it as the best path for us as a church to tread.

And so, I simply ask you to be diligent to unite the church as well. I know that everything here at church won't quite go exactly as you will want it to go. Perhaps some ministry that we will be involved with won't be quite what you want it to be. Perhaps we will be involved in something that you don't quite agree with. I'm not asking you to back down from your convictions. I only ask that you "be diligent" to preserve the unity of the church as well, even when everything isn't quite going the way that you want it to go.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on December 11, 2005 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Ephesians*, p. 61.

[2] A. Skevington Wood, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Volume 11, p. 17.

[3] Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, pp. 60-61.