

(Ephesians) Endeavoring to Keep Unity

by Brian Brodersen

We are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and this requires us to hold fast to the essentials of the faith and work hard to keep unity among ourselves.

Duration: 57:55

Scripture: Ephesians 1:17-18, Ephesians 1:20-21, Ephesians 2:1-5, Ephesians 2:12-13, Ephesians 3:18-19, Ephesians 5:1-2

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the practical application of the book of Ephesians. He emphasizes that our walk with the Lord is a response to what God has already done for us. The speaker highlights the importance of understanding God's love for us and how it should motivate us to respond in gratitude and surrender. The sermon is divided into different sections: sitting in the heavenly places, walking in response to God's love, and standing in the spiritual battle. The speaker begins by addressing the subject of Christian unity and emphasizes the need for believers to walk worthy of their calling.

Transcript

OK, let's turn this evening to Ephesians chapter four is where we pick up tonight in our study of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. As we come to chapter four, we do come now really to a new section in this epistle to the Ephesians. We come to the practical section of the epistle.

The first three chapters are strictly doctrinal. It's here that Paul is laying out some of the great doctrines of the faith, and he's teaching us in the first portion of the epistle about the things that God has done for us. And this is a pattern that you see in all of Paul's writings.

Paul, first of all, always lays out what God has done for us. And then after just really, you know, going deep into the things that God has done, then Paul calls for a response. And he does the same thing in the epistle to the Ephesians that he does in his other epistles.

And you notice that as you go through, you notice that that's his pattern as he writes to the churches. So as we've been studying the first portion of the epistle, as I said, it's been doctrinal, it's been theological. And Paul is pretty much just been concentrating on the great things God has done for us.

You remember, he began by blessing the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him. And then

he said in love, he predestined us to adoption as sons to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. And then he went on to tell us that we have been made accepted in the beloved.

And then having talked about their what God the father has done in choosing and predestining and accepting, he moves on to talk about what the beloved has done, how we've been redeemed through his blood and how we have forgiveness of sins. And then he went into the work of the Holy Spirit. He told us there in chapter one that we are sealed by the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption.

And then in chapter two, he kind of goes over some of the things again, but just from a different sort of an angle. In the second chapter, he reminds us of where we were by our natural condition. We were dead in trespasses and sins and we were walking according to the course of this world.

We were following Satan, basically, and we were under the wrath of God. But then God, who is rich in mercy for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, he made us alive in Christ. And so, Paul, there in the second chapter, he takes us and shows us that we were as low as you could possibly get.

But then in Christ, we've been elevated to the highest position, seated at the right hand of the father. And then you remember there also he prayed there in that first chapter that we'd be able to grasp all of these things, that we would have the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that the eyes of our understanding would be enlightened. And that's what he does all throughout those first three chapters.

And then, as we saw in our last study, he ends the third chapter with another prayer that we would be able to comprehend what is the breadth and the length and the depth and the height and to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. And he closes that whole section with praise and glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations. He also there went into talking about the Gentiles in particular, as you remember, and how our condition was even worse than the Jewish condition in many ways, because we weren't part of those covenants and the things that God had given to Israel.

But he tells us that now we've been brought near by the blood of Christ and we're no longer strangers and foreigners, but we're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. So in the first three chapters, as we look at it, you see there's not a place there where Paul really gives us any sort of exhortation to do anything. He's just lavishing upon us the truths of God, the love of God, the great things that God has done for us.

And basically, he's just calling us to bask in these things, to just sit and soak in these great realities, these great spiritual realities. Commentators have taken the book of Ephesians and they've divided it into different, you know, segments under different headings. And one commentary actually is entitled Sit, Walk and Stand.

And they broke it down in that way. The first three chapters were seated in the heavenly places. We're just sitting there experiencing the great blessings of God.

And then we come to the next session section where we're called to walk. And then finally, the last portion of the epistle calls us to stand in the spiritual battle. So we come now tonight to the next section.

We come to the walking section of the epistle. And it is important to note for our own benefit and for our own understanding when we talk with other people that our walk with the Lord or, you know, our activity is always a response to what God has already done for us. And so Paul seeks to motivate us by love.

He shows us the great love of God for us, and then he basically says, now, look, since God loves you so much and he's done all this, it's reasonable that you go ahead and respond in this way. He never starts with the, you know, cracking the whip of the commandments, but God's method is always to appeal to us by his love and to get us to see how much he loves us and all the great things he's done for us. And then to evoke the natural response of Thanksgiving and praise and and surrender of ourselves to God because of what he's done.

And so we come now to the application. And so he says now before he gets into some of the particulars, actually, the application part here could be divided into two segments. First of all, he deals with the subject of Christian unity.

And then secondly, he goes on to deal to a large degree with the subject of Christian purity. And then we come to the third section where he deals with the Christian warfare. But he takes up this practical aspect now of the epistle with an appeal to believers for Christian unity.

And that's to a large degree what we're going to be talking about tonight. But let's jump in here to chapter four, verse one. Paul says, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

So once again, he goes back to reminding them of his state at the present time, he's a prisoner. But again, he clarifies that he's not a prisoner of Caesar. He believes in the sovereignty of God.

He understands that God has got him there for this time for some reason. And so once again, he refers to himself as a prisoner of the Lord. And he says, I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling.

Now, what Paul is saying is that your walk should equal your call. And the calling, of course, is the great calling, as he referred to it in his epistle to the Philippians. It's the high call of God in Christ Jesus.

And so, again, what he's doing is he's appealing back to everything he said. He's been talking about the calling. And you remember that in one of those prayers that he prayed, he asked specifically for us that we might know what is the hope of our calling and what are the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints.

And so that's what he's referring back to. He says, now I'm beseeching you to walk worthy of that calling, to have a walk that equals the call. So the call is a high call.

The call is a holy call. The call is an awesome call. And so he's saying, basically, now I want your life to equal the calling.

As great as the calling is, that's how your life is to be. And so when people look at you, when people observe you, then they're going to make a connection between your life and the greatness of the call that God has upon your life. And that's the way that we ought to be living.

We ought to be living in such a way that people look at our lives and say, man, that is the kind of life that ought to be lived. Hey, where'd you get that life? How can I get that life myself? That's the kind of life that Paul's calling us to an exemplary life. A life that's full of the spirit.

And so he tells us that we are to walk worthy of the call with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love. So these are the marks. Of the walk that we're being called to.

Lowliness. Lowliness is humility. And, you know, there's something beautiful about a humble life.

There's something attractive about a humble life. I think most people are pretty much repelled by the arrogant person. You know, you meet somebody who's real cocky and, you know, real prideful and you're repelled by that.

You're not drawn to that. You're you're you're wanting to avoid that person a lot of times. But humility is a beautiful thing.

Someone who's truly humble, someone who's not on a big ego trip, you know, someone who's not having to be the center of attraction all of the time and that sort of thing. And so he says that we're to walk in humility. And of course, as we're going to go on and talk about the subject of unity in order to keep unity in the body of Christ, we've got to be humble.

Pride brings contention. Pride brings so often divisions, and so there's the necessity of humility. And then he says gentleness and some translations read humility and meekness.

Here's lowliness and gentleness. So gentleness is to mark the life of the Christian. You know, we're not to be contentious people.

We're not to be argumentative people. We're not to be people always out looking for a fight with somebody, you know. Looking for a doctrinal dispute to get into, looking for someone that we can humiliate by our great theological knowledge or something like that.

We're to be people who are humble and gentle. Paul, in writing to Timothy, when he talks about the characteristics of an overseer in the church, he addresses this particular thing. He says that the overseers are to be gentle to all, humbly seeking to win people to Christ.

And then he says, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love. Long suffering, just what it sounds like suffering for a long time with people and with people that make you suffer because they're irritating, because they have a tendency to agitate you or whatever. And God is so long suffering, he's so patient with us, and so he calls us to be that way as well and bearing with one another in love.

So as he's going to talk now about unity, of course, love is the foundation for unity and we've got to keep that perspective. We've got to keep the perspective that love is the preeminent thing. That's the thing that the Lord is really most interested in our lives in.

He wants to see love in our lives. He wants to see love among ourselves. And I don't know where you've been or what your background is or how long you've been around.

But, you know, in the church, you can find some pretty ugly situations at times. You can find some pretty unloving people. And it's a sad, sad thing because it's completely contrary to the clear teaching of scripture in so many areas.

I read the story of a church split and the church split was so intense that they ended up in court and the courts actually threw the case out. So then they finally ended up in some sort of an ecclesiastical court. You know, they put a church court together and they got in and they fought it out.

And the church ended up dividing into two separate churches. But you know what the root of the problem was, you know, where it all began at an elder's banquet. One elder got a smaller piece of ham than

another one.

And he became enraged about that and, you know, built this case that went to court. Unbelievable. I was talking to a friend of mine yesterday and he's ministering in the San Diego County Jail system.

He oversees as the chaplain, the San Diego County Jails. And he's told me that they have on occasion had to break up fistfights between competing Christian ministry groups coming into the jails. Fighting over the inmates, you know, who gets to minister, and this is really pathetic stuff, but it does happen.

But what a contradiction to what the scriptures tell us here were to bear with one another in love. And now he says this. And let me read you through verse six, beginning in verse three, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. And so Paul here is calling them to unity and he's pointing out the basic facts that there is just one body of Christ.

There's just one spirit of God. There's one hope we all share the same hope. There's one Lord who saved us.

There's one faith that we adhere to. There's one baptism that brings us into the body of Christ. And there's one God who has brought all of this about.

So therefore, since there's this oneness, then there ought to be a oneness among us, he's saying. So he says, endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Now, I want to talk to a large degree about that.

But before we talk about that, I want to talk about something that has been going on in the church for about the last hundred years, something known as the ecumenical movement. And the ecumenical movement is an attempt to bring about Christian unity. I want you to notice what I just said.

It's an attempt to bring about Christian unity. And that's the problem with the ecumenical movement. You see, Christian unity exist.

It's the unity of the spirit. We're not to try to create the unity of the spirit. It's already there.

We're to endeavor to keep it. The ecumenical movement is an attempt to create a unity, but they do so by excluding dogmatic concepts. So the ecumenical movement, which began back in the early part of the 1900s, where Christians said, you know, we need to get together and we all need to have unity with one another.

We need to live in harmony so the world can come to the Lord because all of these divisions are stumbling people and all. So let's all get together. But if we're going to get together, we're going to have to drop some of our dogmatic ideas because those are the things that cause division.

And so the ecumenical movement basically said things like the deity of Christ or Christ being the only way to God or the authority of scripture or things like that cannot be emphasized or held tightly to because those things tend to be divisive. Well, you see, here's the problem with the ecumenical movement. They are trying to create unity, but they're substituting truth, they're giving up truth to create unity and you cannot do that, you can't do that.

There are certain essential things that we have got to hold on to. And if we let go of them, then we basically let go of the Christian faith. And we certainly don't want to do that for the sake of unity.

But if you look at the ecumenical movement, if you look at where it began back in the early 1900s and where it is, where it is today, it's pretty much lost its momentum. And there's you know, it's all divided up and everything else today, but it doesn't stand for anything. It doesn't really mean anything because they threw out the truth in order to get unity and they didn't even get unity in the end.

So when we're talking about unity, we're not talking about that sort of a thing, because, as I said, this is an attempt to create unity, unity already exists, according to the Apostle Paul right here in the third verse, we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. Now. The Church of Jesus Christ.

There's only one church of Jesus Christ, did you know that? There's only one church. We are all part of one church and all of the other believers on the face of the earth are part of that church as well. Now, we are one local manifestation of the Church of Jesus Christ.

But the Church of Jesus Christ is. Much larger than we are, the Church of Jesus Christ has members here on Earth, it also has members in heaven. But let me say this, the Church of Jesus Christ is not headquartered at any one place here on Earth or pastored by any one man or group of men.

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of every individual person who has been born of the spirit through personal faith in Jesus Christ and is manifest here on Earth in millions of fellowships spread all over the planet in every country, among every people and language. Now, some fellowships number in the thousands, some fellowships number in the hundreds, some fellowships number in the tens, and in some fellowships you find just two or three gathered in the name of Jesus. But every one of those people who have put personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ, they are members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

And now what we are to do, Paul says, is we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. You see, with every believer on the face of the Earth tonight, we are one. We are one already because we belong to the same body, we all possess the same spirit, we all are under the same Lord.

We all share the same faith, we've all been baptized into the body of Christ and we all serve the same God. You see, we're already one. Now, what we need to do is endeavor to keep that unity.

Now, there is what we're describing here, as you might call it, the invisible church. It is visible, but it's invisible in the sense that you can't get it all together all at once. And we all share that unity together.

Whether whether we realize it or not, but what the apostle is calling for here is a visible manifestation of the unity. And so he's telling us we really have to work hard at keeping unity among ourselves as believers. And it's not an easy thing to do.

That's why he uses this word endeavor. Endeavor is a word that talks about exerting great effort because our natural tendency is to become divided. Our natural tendency is to say that I'm right and you're wrong, and therefore, I don't want to see you again.

I don't want to talk to you anymore. I don't want to be in the same building you're in or whatever the case might be. That's the tendency that we have and we have to guard against that.

Now, here's what we have to understand. We have to understand that there are essentials. And there are non-essentials.

And the important thing is that we. Hold fast to the essentials of the faith. And these are non-negotiable things.

If a person rejects the essentials of the faith, then I must separate myself from that person. If a denomination rejects the essentials of the faith, then I would be smart to separate myself from that particular denomination. So we can't negotiate with the essentials.

We've got to hold on to them, but there are also non-essentials and quite often it's the non-essentials that are really causing the problem among the people of God. We're divided up over a bunch of non-essential things and we're at enmity with one another because we disagree over things that aren't essential in the sense that they don't really affect whether a person is saved or not. Now, here are the essentials, and we could probably come up with a larger list and someone might have some things they'd want to add to this.

But just thinking about it, trying to boil down, you know, what what are the essentials? In other words, these are the things that you must believe to be a Christian. If you don't believe these things, if you reject these things, if you're opposed to these things, then you're outside of the Christian fold. And we have no obligation to have unity with those kind of people, those people who hold to those things.

So here are the essentials. First is that there is one God. That's an essential.

We believe in one God. We don't we're not polytheistic in any way, shape or form. We don't believe in a multiplicity of gods.

We believe in one God. That's the clear teaching of the Bible. And if you are not holding to a monotheistic view, meaning that there is one God, then you've denied an essential of the faith.

Now, another essential of faith is the Trinity. The Bible teaches that there is one God, but that one God exists in three persons. And if I reject the Trinity, then I'm in essence rejecting God because God is a Trinity.

And some people say, oh, I believe in God. I believe in the God of the Bible. I just don't believe in the Trinity.

Well, then you don't really believe in the God of the Bible because the God of the Bible has revealed himself as a Trinity father, son and Holy Spirit. Another essential is the deity of Jesus Christ. It's essential to believe that Christ is who the Bible says he is, that he is God, the son.

Somebody called us on the radio the other day and asked the question. That was a good question. They said, why do we have to believe that? Well, you see, we have to believe that because the Bible tells us in Isaiah 43, 11, the Lord said that he is God alone, that he is the only savior.

And so. If Jesus Christ is not God, then he cannot be the savior. He must be God to be the savior, because the Lord declared that he alone is the savior.

And so we must believe in the deity of Christ. Now, it's possible that a Christian person is ignorant of this doctrine. There are people that become Christians and they don't fully understand the deity of Christ.

They don't understand that Jesus Christ is actually God, the son. And they come to understand that through a process of time. But if a person says, oh, no, I reject that, I don't believe that I can't believe that there's a trinity to God.

And I I don't believe that Jesus is actually God. I believe that he's an angel or something else. That is an essential that you must believe.

If you reject it, then you are not part of the one faith under the one Lord and the one God. Another essential would be the virgin birth of Christ. Because if Christ was not born of a virgin, then he's not God, the son.

Some people try to hold on to Christianity, but yet reject the virgin birth. Well, if Mary didn't conceive by the Holy Spirit, who did she conceive by? If she conceived by a person, then Jesus Christ is just a human being just like us. And there wasn't a sinless person.

So he would be a sinner just like us, and he would not be able to save us. So the virgin birth is one of those essential doctrines, if we reject that, if we deny that, then I believe that we're rejecting the true faith. I believe that another essential is that Jesus lived a sinless life, because, again, if he didn't live a sinless life, then he was a sinner.

And how could he die for our sins if he had his own sins to deal with? Another essential is the vicarious death of Christ. Meaning that Christ died for us. Now, these are things that I think probably almost everybody I'm talking to, if not everybody, agrees with.

And you think, duh, you know, give me a break. I mean, of course, we're Christians. We all believe this.

Believe me, you can find churches full of people who don't believe any of this stuff. I personally wonder, why do they still go to church? Why do they still call themselves Christians? They've rejected everything that the Bible has to say. They don't really even have a savior.

They've reduced him to a sinful man. Who didn't die on the cross for their sins. But we believe that he died for us.

The Bible teaches that it's an essential and it's an essential also to believe in a bodily resurrection. If we reject the bodily resurrection of Christ, then we have no guarantee that anything that Jesus ever said was actually true. And we certainly have no guarantee that his sacrifice for our sins was accepted by God.

You see, the resurrection does two things. It it proves the claims of Christ, and it also shows us that his sacrifice was acceptable. And so the bodily resurrection is an essential of the faith.

And then one last one here, and that is salvation by grace through faith, not by works. That is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. And Paul fought against those who tried to bring in another gospel, he called it a gospel of works.

He said it's not a gospel at all. It's not the gospel to say that we must work our way to salvation. I must believe that I'm saved by the grace of God, not by my own human effort to win salvation.

So these are the essentials of the faith. And these are the things we hold on to. And these are the things that occasionally we have to break from others over.

These are things that we have to fight for. And these are things that we do divide over on occasion. But it's not a real division within the body of Christ, because those who reject these things are not really a part of the true body of Christ, even though they might appear to be because they attend the church or belong to a particular denomination or something.

But now let's come to the non-essentials. And this is where I think Paul is really hitting at when he's calling us to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. And as I said, this you're going to see as we start to talk about some of these things, that this is an area where we really have to work.

At obeying what God is calling us to do here, we really do have to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, because, as I already mentioned earlier, there's a tendency to break over these things. And so many times as Christians, we break fellowship with each other over things that don't matter really in the bigger picture. And we've got to be careful now, not to say that these aren't important things because they are important things and we can discuss them and we can dispute a bit and we can even argue and we can even get passionate about it.

But in the end, we've got to disagree agreeably. We've got to agree that there are certain things we just won't agree on, but we're still going to love each other. We're still going to be Christians together.

We're still going to recognize one another's legitimate place in the body of Christ, and we're not going to break up over these things. And that has happened far too often. And I think that is one of the big weaknesses in the modern Christian experience among Bible believing people.

We are so divided up over so many different things. And, you know, we might some of us might understand, well, we're really not divided because we've got the unity of the spirit. We're divided over non-essentials.

But, you know, the world doesn't know that. They just look at us and think, boy, these Christians, man, they can't get along with each other. They're always fighting about something.

They're always arguing. And sometimes, you know what they're what they're describing is very accurate. And so as we look at some of these non-essentials, these are things that maybe you're going to say, oh, wait a second now, you know, maybe you're going to get your feathers ruffled a bit.

And I will be honest right up front here, I've been very contentious over some of these things at times. And yet, as time goes on, the Lord shows me that, you know, OK, not to say it's not important, but it's not anything to start a holy war over. You know, we've got to be careful.

And so let's look at some of the non-essentials that have really caused disunity and division in the body of Christ, things that we need to really be careful about. Number one, modes of baptism. Modes of baptism, there are different views on how a person ought to be baptized.

Some people baptized by full immersion, they are known as the Baptist. And others baptized by full immersion, and that's great. And I think as you look at the scriptures, it seems that that's the scriptural mode of baptism.

But there are a few passages where you wonder, you know, were they fully immersed there? But there have been battles, great contentions over modes of baptism. So some believe in immersion, some believe in sprinkling. You don't have to be fully immersed, just a little sprinkle will do it.

Some believe that you ought to be baptized in Jesus name. Some believe you need to be baptized in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. And if you didn't do it the prescribed way, then it's doubtful that you're even a Christian.

And there has been great contention. Over baptism, some believe that you should baptize your baby, some believe that you should. And again, these things are things that are not essentials.

Now, I hold convictions in these areas, and I believe that the Bible teaches certain things about baptism. I personally believe in that we shouldn't baptize infants. I think dedication is a more biblical thing.

I think baptism is reserved for people who have made a decision for Christ and infants don't do that. We know that baptism by immersion. I'm not.

Bothered by that, I don't I've actually I shouldn't say this, I'll get in trouble saying over the air, I've actually sprinkled somebody baptizing them once. That's my Catholic background, you know, kind of just to throw over from the old days. Actually, one time I was doing a baptism down in the sea and there was a lady who came and she was absolutely petrified of the ocean and just with everything in her, she could not bring herself to to be immersed in the sea.

And, you know, I was not going to turn her away and say, I'm sorry, then you can't be baptized, sister, unless you're ready to go in and die for Jesus right here in the shore break. You know, you're not going to be baptized. I couldn't do it.

I felt like the Lord said. Don't worry about it, just do for what she's asking to be done. So but again, these these are things that it's a non-essential, so we don't want to be so dogmatic about it that we exclude other people from our fellowship because they don't agree with us on this particular point.

We should be able to disagree about it, but yet at the same time, still embrace one another and recognize that this person is just as much a Christian as I am, even though we hold different opinions on this non-essential. Now, here's another thing, ministry models. You have various ministry models.

Traditionally, you have what's known as the Episcopalian or Episcopal model, which is modeled on the bishop's rule, and then you have the Presbyterian model, which is modeled on the elders rule like a plurality of leaders. And then you have a congregational model, which is just what it sounds like. The congregation sort of makes the decisions for the direction of the church and so forth.

And these are different opinions about how a ministry ought to operate. Now, the interesting thing is the scriptures do not give us a crystal clear picture and you can find support, you find little support for the congregational model. I don't think you can find much for that, really, but for the Presbyterian or the or the Episcopal model, you can find some biblical support for both of them.

But because the scripture isn't clear on it or the scripture doesn't say at any particular point, this is the ministry model, do this and don't do anything else that to become dogmatic about it and to insist that it's got to be one or the other and that will fight you to the death, which they have done historically. Those who held to the bishop rule fought against those who embrace the elder rule and vice versa. You see, these are the kinds of things the world looks on and thinks, what are you doing? Why are you doing this? And it's a good question.

We do it so often because we're not walking in love now in a more current situation. We have some new ministry models that have arisen in the past 10, 15 years, and one of the ministry models that's becoming very popular is the ministry model that you could refer to it as a seeker sensitive ministry. And these are the ones who are seeking to attract the unchurched.

And so their whole service is set up in such a way to not offend and things like that. And you know what? I disagree with that ministry model. I don't think it's a good model.

But I have to be careful not to go too far and not to write off people who are using that model or people who, you know, embrace it in some way. I have to be on my guard. I have to watch out because I can be dogmatic.

I can be passionate about something and I can say all those ministries are worthless. They're not doing anything for the kingdom. They're doing a disservice.

And then I meet some person who's wonderfully saved and I say, where'd you get saved? And they tell me it's like, oh, no, you couldn't have gotten saved there. Come on. That's happened to me.

And when those kinds of things happen, you know what happens? The Lord speaks to me, says, look, these are not essential things. And again, not to say that there's not a better way to do it because there might be. But if I take a hard position and I write people off over those things and I'm not walking in love.

And so I've got to recognize that God works even in less than ideal conditions and in ministries that aren't modeled exactly upon the scripture, as I think they ought to be. And there's probably a good case that they should be. But nevertheless, we have to in these areas, we have to step back and say, well, Lord, I'm going to just leave it in your hands.

And evidently you're doing something there. And I don't want to I don't want to come against that eschatology. That's a theological term for the study of the last days.

And when it comes to eschatology, we have the issues concerning the millennium. Christians do not all agree over the issue of the millennium. There are three different positions.

Basically, there's what you call a millennial, which means no millennium. There's post millennial, which means that Christ will come to earth at the end of the millennium. And then there is the position that we hold to of premillennial, which means that Christ will come to the earth and begin the millennial period.

Now, there are many good Christians who do not hold a premillennial view of eschatology. I don't see how in the world they could hold their a millennial or post millennial view. I think it's a ridiculous view and I've disputed with them over that view, but I've tried to be careful not to break fellowship over those things.

You can get passionate about it. It can become intense. And yet we have to at the end of the day, we have to just step back and say, OK, this is one of those things where you're going to hold your position.

I'm going to hold mine. We're never going to change each other's mind. Let's drop that and just embrace each other in Christ because we're both saved by grace through faith.

And so we have to be careful. But it's amazing how the church has been divided over the millennial thing. And it comes from every camp.

The premillennial people think the post and a millennial people are stupid and the a millennial people think the premillennial people are just complete idiots. You know, how could you ever think that, you know, you just you know, they just write us off as basically pinheads, you know, we just don't know anything. That's why we hold to this view.

And then, of course, there's the more familiar issues of pre-tribulationism, mid-tribulationism, post-tribulationism. And for those of you that were here Monday night, I taught on the rapture of the church and I am a deeply committed pre-tribulationist. I absolutely believe in pre-tribulationism.

I think mid and post are stupid views. But I think there's some wonderful Christian people that hold those views. And although I would butt heads with them and we would argue about it and we would sit down and challenge each other, we would in the end embrace one another and say, you know what? It doesn't matter.

It's not an essential. But we have to be careful because, you know, sometimes, I mean, you get taught a certain way and then you meet somebody that holds a different view and they go, my goodness, are they could they really, truly be Christian and hold to this other view? You see, that's where it's important to distinguish between an essential and a non-essential issue. And we can't be dividing up over the non-essentials.

When I was pastoring in Vista years ago, I had a number of people in the church that disagreed with me on a variety of theological issues and they would come to me at times and they would tell me they disagreed with me and then they would sort of wait like for me to boot them out. And I'd say, well, that's fine if you disagree with me. I don't I'm not bothered by that.

What I will be bothered by is if you insist on going throughout the church, telling everybody that my view is wrong and yours is right. If you want to do that, then you might as well hit the road before you get started. But if you're happy to be here and know that we just disagree on this, then that's fine.

I'm not going to try to force you to believe what I believe about this. I'm going to hold to my convictions. And you have to respect that when I stand in the pulpit and teach, I'm going to teach my conviction.

I'm going to teach it with passion. If you can endure that. Then fine, please stay with us.

And most people did occasionally someone would leave, but most people stayed. And that's the way we need to approach these things. Then we have issues regarding the person and the work and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

And again, these kinds of things have brought a lot of division in the church, and we have to again be on our guard when it comes to being divided over these things. Some people say if you don't speak in tongues, you're not saved. Others say if you do speak in tongues, you're demon possessed.

This is all coming from Christians toward one another. You know, that's both of those positions are absolutely ridiculous. And to say either one is absurd.

And it's not only an obviously ignorant statement biblically, but it's certainly an unloving. Thing to say as well, and so we have to be careful, there are many Christians who believe, as we do in what we refer to as the baptism with the Holy Spirit. We believe that there is a work of the spirit subsequent to salvation that empowers us to serve God.

We call that the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There are many good Christian people who do not believe that they believe that the minute you're saved, you get everything, you got it all the moment you're saved. There is no subsequent work of the spirit.

And in both camps, you have a tendency to dismiss one another, those who are in that what you call a cessationist camp, camp where they say there are no gifts of the spirit today. Anybody who speaks in tongues is not really, you know, being led by the spirit, but, you know, by something else probably or, you know, there's no prophecy today or that sort of thing. Those are what you would call cessationist theologically, and oftentimes they're very forceful in their position and they're very uncharitable towards any who disagree with them.

And then the same is true going the other direction. It doesn't really work one way. It works both ways.

And those who hold to the baptism of the spirit and the gifts for today, they just say all those guys, you know, I don't even know if they're saved. And those are the things we've got to be careful about. One of my favorite Bible teachers, and I think probably many of you enjoy him as well, is Dr. J. Vernon McGee.

I love this ministry. I love listening to him every time I turn on the radio. I get blessed when I hear him, but he took the position that the gifts of the spirit ended with the apostolic age.

And I remember hearing him one time teach on tongues and he just, you know, ridiculed the idea, you know, and he said, if you want to. He was talking about Dorcas, I think, in Acts chapter 10, you know, and he said, if you want a real spiritual gift, friends, then start sewing. You know, that's that's in his mind.

Sewing was a real spiritual gift, you know, not speaking in tongues. And but yet who could ever deny that J. Vernon McGee was a man of God, who could ever deny that he was a man filled with the spirit of God, even though he didn't believe that could happen. It happened to him, obviously, because when he teaches, it's obvious the spirit of God is upon his life.

And so we have to be careful. We have to. You see, as Paul said, we have to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, because, like I said, we can become passionate about these things.

And I I can get very passionate theologically. And I will just tell you honestly, I've I've grown a lot over the years when I was, you know, 20 years ago, I could have never preached this message to tell you the truth, because I didn't think this way. Man, if you disagreed with my view, you know, I'm going to fight you to the death on it.

But but you grow in time and the Lord shows you things. And these are some of the things I've been learning over the years. But here's here's a couple more issues and then we're going to finish up.

But again, just because it's important, I think that we understand that although these are important things and although we can hold to them, we need to be careful. And here's here's another issue it's commonly referred to as the Calvinist Armenian dispute. But just to, you know, sort of clarify it a little more, it would be a couple of issues, for example, human freedom and the sovereignty of God.

There are people who hold fast to human freedom that man must choose. And then there are other Christians who say no man has no choice in the matter. It's it's all up to the sovereignty of God.

Well, I believe that there is the element of human freedom, but I have good friends who believe in the sovereignty of God position. And although we've discussed it back and forth and sometimes we've raised our voices in the process of doing it, we can walk away and still appreciate one another and love one another and respect one another, even though we don't hold the same position. We had a call a couple of weeks back on the radio program.

And just to give you an idea of what can happen, the guy calls and he says, he says, is Calvinism, would that be similar to Mormonism or to Jehovah's Witnesses? He said he said this. He said, are Calvinist members of a cult? Are they non-Christians? Is what he was asking. And I said, well, you know, why do you ask that? And he said, well, I heard somebody teaching and they said that they were not true believers, but they were more like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons.

And I said, well, you know, maybe you misunderstood what he said. He said, no, no, I didn't misunderstand. They went on for a couple of minutes and that's what they said.

And I said, no, I'm sorry that, you know, that isn't the case, that. Whatever you know, I respect the person that you heard saying that, but I will disagree with them on that point. These are Christian people, they love Jesus Christ, they're saved by his grace, just like we are, but they do hold to a different view.

I don't agree with it, but nevertheless, I would never put them in that camp. Of course, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons are in a different camp because, as we've already discussed, the essentials, they deny the essentials of the Christian faith. That's why they're not Christians.

They are members of pseudo Christian cults. And then there's the issue of eternal security and. Or losing your salvation.

And this is another aspect of the Calvinist Armenian dispute, and there are some Christians who believe that you can lose your salvation and some Christians that believe you can never lose your salvation. But you know what? It's a non-essential. But yet there are times when we can get that sort of attitude.

It's like, oh, well, that guy over there, he he believes in eternal security. What's he doing here? You know, we don't believe that or, you know, that guy over there, he believes that you can lose your salvation, probably not even save. Come on, you know, it happens because we're human, because we're sinful, because.

At times we don't endeavor, and here's one final one, and this is one I'm very passionate about, I'll tell you the creation issue. And I'm very passionate about a literal six days creation period, I believe the Bible teaches that. I don't believe that God created the earth over millions of years.

And what is called the day age theory that each day does not represent 24 hours, but it represents, you know, possibly millions of years. I think that's a ludicrous position. And I I'm pretty passionate about this issue.

And when I hear this is an area where I I have to endeavor, because when I you know, when I hear Christians saying that sort of thing or in any way, shape or form, giving any sort of credibility to evolutionary ideas, I just, you know. Those are fighting words to me, and yet again, those are areas where I find myself, I have to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit, I have to recognize as important as those issues are, and they are important and we should never underestimate the importance of them. But they are not essentials in the sense that we would say that someone who disagrees with us on that cannot

possibly be a Christian.

And there's some that have, I think, moved in that direction. And that's not that's not doing what the apostle said to do. We must endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit.

So when it comes to these nonessentials, this is where we need to, as Paul said, we need to bear with one another in love. We need to let the world know that we're not against each other. We need to let the world know that we love each other and that we can maturely hold different views and still care about each other and still recognize the validity of one another's experience with Christ.

We need to do that. The world needs to see that. And so God help us to.

Obedied the exhortation here to endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. To recognize that. There are certain things that although they're important.

They're not things that we want to write people off over, we want to be able to hold to our views and and stand fast on our convictions, but we also want to be able to say, you know, even though I don't agree with you on this, I still love you in Christ because I recognize that you're a brother. I've had a couple of recent. Well, a phone call and an email from some Catholic brothers, and they've been upset at some of the things that have been said over the year.

And I have strong disagreements with the Catholic Church. But at the same time, I'm absolutely certain that there are true believers there and I want to love them. Not having to change my view or necessarily force them to change their view on certain things, but just be able to accept that we're never going to agree on these particular issues right here.

But I do recognize that you have received Christ. You've realized that salvation is by grace and you've called out to Christ and he's become your savior. And although you're in a system that I disagree with to a large extent, I want to acknowledge your relationship with the Lord and I want to respect that.

And so when I get the the phone call or the email, you know, I want to look at it and I want to I want to take it seriously and say, now, you know, is there some validity to what they're saying? I don't want to be overly critical. I don't want to be hypercritical and just, you know, criticize everything and not point out maybe areas where there are some strengths and good things. So I think that is what the Lord is calling us to to walk in love so that those outside.

I can see that even though we don't agree with each other on certain things, the power of Christ is greater than our disagreements, and we can still love each other and we can still serve the Lord side by side with one another. So. That's where the apostle begins in the practical aspect of the epistle, he begins with unity in our next study, we'll move on to talk about the gifts of God and the purpose of those gifts in bringing the saints to perfection to do the work of the ministry.

Let's close in prayer. Lord, we thank you for. Your love.

And Lord, that even when we. Have been so wrong about everything, you kept loving us. And Lord, help us to do as you've exhorted us to here, help us, Lord, to really put forth effort.

To keep the unity of the spirit. To recognize, Lord, you in others of different denominations or different fellowships or whatever, and even if we don't agree. On the finer points of theology, or if we don't agree

with certain practices or things that aren't really essential matters, help us, Lord, to just walk in love and may that be the mark upon our lives.

And so, Lord, we just ask you to help us in this area, fill us with your spirit.

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