

And when we decide to agree to disagree on the teachings of God's Word, we put every doctrine of Scripture at risk. It's like playing dominoes. Knock one down and, eventually, they're all going down, ultimately the person of Jesus and his payment for our sins.

But praise be to God, for he has been merciful to us. He's brought his Word into our lives. He's connected us to himself through his Word and the water of Holy Baptism. He's taught us the truth about our sin and death, and he's impressed on us how serious our sin and death problem really is. **"The wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23a)**, he tells us. But he's also taught us the truth about how he has taken our sins away and saved us through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. **"But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ro 6:23b)**, he says.

By the grace of God, you and I know these amazing truths, and so many more. And the more we learn, the more God matures us in our faith and strengthens our unity with him and with other Christians. No longer are we spiritual infants but, as Paul says in **verses 15 and 16**, **"speaking the truth in love, we grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."** Every contact we have with God's Word—in worship, in Bible classes and small groups, in conversations and discussions with others, in our daily devotions and personal Bible readings, in Christian songs we hear on the radio—even in the passages that we've memorized and remember, will make us stronger in our faith. As a result, we become a church of spiritual grown-ups, a church that is united by the truths of God's Word.

Those four men who tried to build a house eventually got back together. They realized that agreeing to disagree was a bad idea. They sat down and studied the blueprint together; they examined the set of plans for that house. And, after studying, they were united, and they built a beautiful house.

As we move forward in our goal, in our mission, of building God's Church, as we strive to *bring every person in our area of influence closer to Jesus*, may we remember the secret to unity. Let's make it a point to gather as often as we can to hear and study God's Word together. For as we do, God promises to bind us together into a family of believers that will glorify him here on earth and forever in heaven. Amen.

**Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16** – *United* – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
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Once there were four men who decided to join forces to build a house. They chose a starting date and began to work. It didn't take long for them to start having problems. The first said, "I think the bathroom should go here." "No," said the second one. "That's where the dining room goes." "That's not where the dining room goes," said the third man. "That's where the kitchen goes." "You're all wrong," said the fourth. "That's where the garage should be." None of them could agree on how the house should be built. There was no unity.

A local pastor stopped by to see how things were going. He listened to their complaints, and then said, "That sounds a lot like my church. Some folks believe that we should baptize babies. Others don't. Some say that we should allow anyone to take Communion. Others disagree. Some people believe that we're too liberal. And some say that we haven't loosened up enough. The people in my church don't agree on anything." "So, how does your church stay together?" the builders asked. "Well," said the pastor, "we just agree to disagree. Maybe that's what you should try."

The four builders thought it over and said, "Let's try it. Let's agree to disagree." But that didn't work. It wasn't long before they were so upset with each other that they all gathered up their tools and went their separate ways. There was no unity.

If unity is such an important thing when building a house, how much more important it is when building the church. That's our goal, isn't it? To build the church. Remember, the church isn't a building; it's people. Over the past few weeks we've learned how God's Church, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, is all those people everywhere who over the course of time have been moved by the Holy Spirit to believe in Jesus as their Savior. Our goal, our mission, is to bring people together into the unity of God's Church.

Many churches today contend that it's OK to agree to disagree, but God says that won't work. Oh, we certainly can disagree when it comes to things like what language to use in our worship services, or when to schedule worship times, or what words to put on our Janesville Road church sign. But we cannot agree to disagree on things that are in the Bible. Doctrinal things. Things that are either right or wrong. Things that are either true about Jesus or not. These are things on which God says we must be united.

Today we're going to take a quick snapshot of unity. We're going to see how it's God who creates unity, and we're going to celebrate the wonderful results of unity. This we're going to do under the theme:

### **We Make Every Effort to Preserve Our Unity**

Paul writes in the first verse of our text, *"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."*

Paul is writing this letter while he's a prisoner in Rome. Even though he has his own problems to think about, he's more concerned about the church in Ephesus. He started this church and now, in prison, he writes them this letter of encouragement. He wants them to live lives worthy of the calling they received; they belong to the Lord. And he wants them to be united. These are his Spirit-inspired words in verses 2-6: *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."* That's biblical unity – a group of people who bear with each other in love, a group of people where there is one hope, one faith, one baptism, and one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Every Christian church the world over wants to have that kind of unity. But not every church is willing to take the steps necessary to make it happen. So many different people come into the church – people with different backgrounds, different personalities, different abilities, different ideas. How do you unite all these people? How do you get them all on the same page? Drinking coffee together is good. Talking to each other outside of worship services is good. Joining a small group and volunteering together is good. These are things that help us to know each other better. But none of them creates unity. Something else, something deeper, needs to happen.

Many churches believe that, if you just downplay any religious differences, there'll be unity. Just believe in God; believe that he's good and that Jesus is good, too. Just be loving and accepting of one another – that's all that really matters. On pretty much everything else in the Bible, ignore the differences. Just agree to disagree.

But that doesn't work, either. It's like those four men who were trying to build a house. All their agreeing to disagree didn't work. It led them to throw up their hands in frustration and walk away. Only God can establish unity, true unity, so let's see how he does that.

Paul writes in verse 11, *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers."* All of these people were what we might call, "Word of God people." These were the ones who taught doctrine; these were the ones who taught the Word of God. Through these people—and through the Word they taught—God united his church. In verses 12 and 13 Paul explains why they taught God's Word, namely, *"to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* How was the early church built up and united? It didn't happen from agreeing to disagree. It didn't happen when people shared a cup of coffee, either. It happened from learning doctrine, learning God's Word, focusing on the teachings of the Bible.

You see, that's why God's Word is so important. That's why we gather in our worship services and Bible classes and small groups to read it and hear it and study it together. God uses his Word to unite us. Biblical unity happens when we study God's Word together. As we study it, we discover some amazing things about ourselves and our natural tendencies. Paul writes in verse 14, *"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."* That's how we are spiritually when we agree to disagree.

Imagine an infant sitting in an inflatable raft in the middle of Lake Michigan on a windy day. He's being tossed back and forth by the waves and blown all over the place by the wind. That's how we are if we're not willing to let God instruct and guide us by his Word; we're *"blown here and there by every wind of teaching."* One minute we believe this. The next minute, we believe that. We remain spiritual infants, susceptible to *"the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."* We become easy targets for false teachers and their dangerous and—in some cases, even damning—false teachings. In the second of his letters to Timothy, Paul raises the red flag of warning, when he writes, *"The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (4:3, 4).* In our sinful nature, we want to hear only those things that make us feel good and that agree with our way of thinking.