

## **Covenant Life: Organic Unity**

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church  
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#### **Intro.**

Matthew 26:27 ought to break our hearts and heal our hearts every time we hear it. “Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them and said, “Drink from it all of you. 28 For this is My blood that establishes the covenant; it is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Think about it. When God made a covenant with Abraham He (God) passed between the pieces of the animals Abraham had slain: a cow, a goat, a ram, a turtledove and a pigeon. Blood was shed, but none of it was from Abraham or God. When God established the Sinai covenant with Moses and the Israelites, blood was shed (Ex. 24:8), but again, none from Moses and none from God. The same was true of the covenant with David. But when Christ came to institute the New Covenant, the covenant that fulfilled all the other covenants, the covenant that fully relates God to man forever, he sealed that covenant with His own blood, as we will celebrate today.

If the blood shed by Christ, and the death Christ suffered did not do anything else, it ought to accomplish at least one thing once and for all. It ought to impress upon our hearts how serious God is about His relationship with us. You know why animals were killed and their blood always shed in the making of covenants, don't you? It symbolized how seriously all parties were to take the bond that was being established. All parties are saying, including God, “May my own life be taken and my own blood poured out if I fail to honour the stipulations of this covenant.”

So dear friends, when we hear Jesus saying, “This is my blood that establishes the covenant,” you know you are in the presence of something holy and powerful. Jesus offered himself on the cross as the covenant sacrifice for the many who would believe on Him. He and the Father are serious about carrying out their covenant responsibilities. That's why we are called to be equally serious in being true to our own covenant responsibilities before God.

I want to remind you of two things I said last week about the concept of Covenant and the Christian life. (1) I said that God has always related to the human race by means of covenants, starting with the covenant He made with Adam in the Garden, continuing through the covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David, and finishing with the New Covenant that was established through the shed blood of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) I also pointed out last week that throughout history godly people have made secondary covenants for the purpose of encouraging one another to maintain covenant obedience before the God of the New Covenant. This is the purpose of our church covenant. It is established between born again men and women who agree to be accountable to one another so that when we stand before God we can say that we, like our forefathers, are serious about keeping our part of God's covenant. We'll never be as serious and determined about our part as God is about His, but I think all of us will agree that the love of Christ ought to constrain us to greater commitment every day.

## HBC Covenant, Section 1

This is the first of four major divisions within our church covenant. So the first thing we need to do is take a moment to see how the first one relates to what's coming.

1. **I will protect the unity of my church.** (This section relates to how well we understand Christ's work in the world—He gave Himself for the church, Eph. 5:25).
2. **I will share the responsibility of my church.** (This section shows how well we understand the purpose of our salvation—As the Father has sent me, I am sending you, John 20:21).
3. **I will serve the ministry of my church.** (This section reveals the degree to which the New Birth has taken hold in our lives—For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them, Eph. 2:10).
4. **I will support the testimony of my church.** (This section exposes our true hope, as well as our zeal for the glory of God—But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you, Mat. 6:33).

Now let's take a closer look at section 1, **I will protect the unity of my church.**

It seems to me that the big question in documents like this is always the fundamental question behind all others: WHY? Why should I protect the unity of my church? But you know what? There's a question below this one, one that strikes at the foundation of the Christian life: Why church? At all? To answer both those questions, let's go to today's text.

### Today's text

Ephesians 4:1 Therefore *(Paul has just been speaking of God's ultimate purpose for the church)* I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, 3 diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

### Why is unity important?

- I will protect the unity of my church because the unity of his people was uppermost in Jesus' mind when He went to the cross.

John 17:20 I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in Me through their message. 21 May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me. 22 I have given them the glory You have given Me. May they be one as We are one. 23 I am in them and You are in Me. May they be made completely one, so the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.

- I will protect the unity of my church because Paul and the other apostles believed unity within the body of Christ was important enough to suffer and die for. (See v. 1 of today's text) Notice that Paul was a prisoner for the Lord. If Jesus was willing to die for the church, then a years in prison were too few for Paul if it meant God's work would go forward.

- I will protect the unity of my church because nothing else will better display the unity of the Godhead before a divided world. Look again at today's text.
  1. We are born again by the Spirit of unity. (Organic unity)
  2. We are united by the peace of God.
  3. We are immersed into the one body of Christ. This baptism is an immersion into the body of Christ that is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.
  4. We are unified by our common hope. All of us are sinners. All of us are saved the same way—by grace, through faith. God is no respecter of persons. The same Lord, over all, is rich unto all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:12).
  5. We are unified by our common confession: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God

With all this oneness at work in us, how could we be anything but unified in all things that relate to Christ? But to go back to the original question, why is unity important?

Let me answer it in part like this. Unity, and the battle for unity, is of vital importance because without it we have no way of relating to God! I'm not saying you can't relate to God by yourself. Of course you can. But you cannot relate to God, either by yourself or in a crowd of worshippers, if you are unwilling to be in unity with God's people, or uninterested in unity with the people of God. (Unity, not uniformity)

Here's an eternal fact! If you are not quenching the Spirit, that is, if you are setting Him free to do the work He intends to do in your life, then He will be drawing you toward your brothers and sisters. He will be opening you to a growing number of relationships of commitment, love and support among the brothers and sisters who make up the body of Christ.

### **How is unity achieved?**

That question is answered in the subpoints of our church covenant. I will protect the unity of my church. . .

1. By acting in love toward other members.

Rom. 14:19 So then, we must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

I Peter 1:22 Have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart."

We might ask, why do we sometimes fail to act in love toward others in the church. I wonder if the answer lies in the word "member." The word is not wrong in itself. We are members of the church. But "member" probably carries the wrong connotation. Listen to how Paul describes those who make up the church.

Rom. 12:9 Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honour.

God help us to stop seeing one another as members of the church, but brothers and sisters in God's family.

2. By refusing to gossip.

Eph. 4:29 No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

Scripture has plenty to say on this subject because gossip can be like a deadly virus in a church.

James 1:26 If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, then his religion is useless and he deceives himself.

Prov. 10:18 The one who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.  
19 When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise.

Prov. 18:8 A gossip's words are like choice food that goes down to one's innermost being.

Prov. 17:9 Whoever conceals an offense promotes love, but whoever gossips about it separates friends.

Triangulation: I've spoken about this before, and gotten a surprising amount of negative feedback. You know what triangulation is, don't you? That's where two of us get together to talk about a third person. This is exactly what Scripture is condemning when it says a gossip's words are like choice food. Oh man, we love to get the inside dope on other people. It makes us feel so much better to know that other people are bigger failures, or bigger fools than we are. We're gossip addicts, and we don't want to give it up.

So the only godly response when someone wants to tell you how badly a third person has hurt them is to say, "I can't talk about that with you, but I can pray for you while you go make things right with them." If they say they can't do it, or don't feel they can do it alone, then you might volunteer to go with them for moral support. But the one thing you can't do is join them in tearing down the other person behind their back. To do so is to violate the main verse under this section: the only thing that is to come out of our mouths is "what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear."

But someone will say, "But I need to talk it out. How can I even live if I can't talk with my friends about what's bothering me?" It might be appropriate to ask another question, "How can you live in the Spirit if you spend time with your friends tearing down other people?" We just read from Proverbs that it is godly to promote love by concealing offenses. Is that not what Christ has done for all of us as He covers our sins with His blood and makes them invisible to His Father?

3. By following the leaders.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

- The Christian life gets real when lived in the presence of other people. By myself I can easily believe I'm the greatest Christian alive. In the presence of others I am constantly humbled. God gave leadership to the church because they become the visible, undeniable, flesh-and-blood expressions of His watch care.
- Who has the right to speak into your life? Does anyone have the right to speak into your life?