

Becoming a Great Church

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Ephesians 4:1 - 3

God has put this message on my heart. It is one that I share with our planters. We need *great churches* that will greatly impact and influence their communities. What do you think it would take to make a great church? Is it the size of the church that makes it great? I have been in small churches that are great. Is it the building that makes a great church? Is a charismatic leader? I believe every church has the potential of being great! Of course, I think we know that the people make a great church. It's people becoming great at having great relationships. That's why Satan works so hard to cause relationship issues within the church. What I am going to share is not about becoming a great church, but we are also going to learn how to become great at our relationships. *The health of our relationships will determine the health of the church and how great the church can become and how much impact it will have on the culture.* We are going to learn six basic principles from one of the most prolific writers in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul, and in particular from his letter to the church he planted in Ephesus. The first half of Ephesians talks about how God has made us to be special people, holy people, how we are wonderfully blessed in His sight. Paul paints the picture of who you are in Christ, that you are more than you have ever imagined you could be because of who Jesus is.

Ephesians 4:1 is the pivotal verse of the book. He says "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" that we received. Chapters four through six are all about our walk in Christ. We've been made ready by the Holy Spirit to walk in Jesus Christ. These three chapters tell us not only how we walk in our relationships, in our marriages, in our parenting, in the church, and our attitudes about life, but they tell how to excel in those relationships! As we walk in an attitude that is Christ centered our attitude about life will make a real difference in us and in our communities, and particularly in the church. Each one of us who say we belong to this church have an obligation to each other to become all that God wants us to be and when that happens the church becomes a great church.

Six basic principles of how great relationships create a great church:

Principle #1 - Work to develop a great *attitude!*

Be completely *humble and gentle*; be *patient*, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:2) NIV To develop great relationships and becoming a great church we must work on three areas or attitudes on how we relate to each other. Jesus said, *"Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you're My disciples."* These three areas/attitudes are the roadmap to way we are to love each other. I have found that these three words are words often get redefined and misused all the time, especially the first one. *Humility.* Humility is not seeing ourselves as less important. It is seeing others as more important. A lot of people

think that humility is putting myself down. That is not it at all. Humility is lifting the Lord up. Humility is a word that has to do with perspective, how we see things, how you see yourself in relationship to others. A lot of people when they look at themselves in relationship to others, they'd say "I'm up here and they're down there as far as needs. My needs are always going to be met first. Then if there's some time left over; I might help out with other people." Was Jesus that way, though? He had it all reversed. That was humility. He had that kind of humility.

Gentleness. For some of you guys you may think that gentleness is getting in touch with your feminine side. That's sort of a woman kind of a thing, isn't it? No, it is not. Two of the greatest people in the Bible are called the gentlest people who lived in their day. When Moses was alive, he was called the gentlest man alive. This is the guy who split the Red Sea. This is the guy who faced the entire Egyptian army. And he was called the gentlest man alive. And Jesus was called gentle (meek of heart). He had gentleness in His life. This isn't a feminine quality like some people picture it. They mess with the idea of what gentleness is all about. Gentleness is a quality that every one of us needs in our lives. It really means power under control. It is a great word. There is a lot of pictures behind it. In the day when the New Testament was written, the word "gentleness" was used when you were referring to a medicine that could cure somebody – a gentle medicine, soothing. It was used when referring to a wind that might push a boat along at just the right speed. Or it was used when referring to a horse, a stallion that had been broken and you could ride now. When you look at all those things – the medicine and the wind and the horse – out of control all of those could be very destructive. The wrong medicine, out of control could kill you. If the wind goes out of control it's a tornado or hurricane. But under control all those things become a healing force in relationships. And God says, "I want this to be an attitude in your life. That there is a gentleness in your life. This great power that I've given you is under My control. And under My control you have a different attitude towards life."

Patience. A transliteration of this word from the Greek language is "long tempered". We talk about being short tempered, but we do not have a word in our language for long tempered. But that is what this means. We've all heard of people who have a short fuse. This means somebody who has a long fuse. That's part of the attitudes that you and I must develop towards each other if we're going to be a great church. To be a great church that means I've got a long temper towards people. It means I show gentleness towards the people that are around me. I have humility in my relationships with other people. Do you want to develop those attitudes? The best way to do it is look at Jesus Christ. He is the best example of those attitudes. Learn from the master. I love what it says in the last part of that verse. *"Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another with love."* That literally says to me if we are going to be a great church

and have great relationships. We must put up with each other sometimes. That's part of what it means to be a great church. That's true because a great church is not distant from one another. It is not like we just show up to church and then leave. God looks at the church as a spiritual family. In a family you get close to each other. When you get close to people you notice some of their weaknesses. And when you notice some of their weaknesses, they start to irritate you a little bit. That's why the people that are in your family, that you're the closest to irritate you the most. We know each other. We get to see each other every day. We get to smell their dirty laundry. *The thing that makes us a spiritual family is we have decided we want that closeness.* Part of it means we must put up with each other sometimes. Part of it means we see the weakness in each other's lives. But it's worth it to be the family that God wants us to be. I think that's one of the greatest phrases in the Bible "putting up with each other... bearing with each other... in love."

Principle #2 - Make a great *effort!*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3) NIV We all know that it takes effort to develop and keep great relationships. It is a very naive person who thinks there will never be any struggles. That's not the way the Bible pictures it. *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* It doesn't say some effort or a good try. It says, "Make every effort." Those of you who have gone through relational struggles this last year or recently, you're thinking, "It's tough sometimes!" There are areas of life that we tend to have the most struggles: struggles with yourself and with others. *A hurting person hurts others.* Paul says our responsibility is first to have Christ attitude and then "you" make the effort! He says, "do your part." Why would he say, *"Make every effort,"* I'm not talking about the hard work in the physical, I'm talking about the hard work of depending upon His Spirit. Hard work doesn't have to be unpleasant. When you have worked hard on a project and you've gotten it done and you're pleased how it's turned out and you get to enjoy it, that's not unpleasant. Romans 8 says, "all things work together for the good?" Say that with me, "all things." Even though the work is hard, it does not have to be unpleasant because we know that God's Spirit is going to work through us to work it out. Making every effort to keep unity in our lives is we get to set back and look at the results of that project for an eternity. We are going to spend eternity with each other. Determine to work at it, but as you do, understand God's process. *The effort is mine.* It says, *"Make every effort."* It is talking about you. It's saying you must make an effort to make this work. But that is not the entire process. Unity is the Spirit's. *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."* The effort that we're making is not for us to create unity. We do not have to do that. The effort that we're making is to keep the unity that the Spirit has already given us. We've got the Holy Spirit inside of us. Don't make the mistake of thinking, "I've got to make this all up myself. I've got to construct this unity all by myself." That is not

what we're trying to do. What we're trying to do is to keep the unity, to hold on to the unity, to enjoy the unity that the Holy Spirit has already given to us as a gift. There is two different ways of looking at things. We try not to build our own unity but to keep the unity of the Spirit. How? ... Through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3) NIV The bond of peace is the cross. Ephesians 2 tells us that the peace that's come into our lives was bought at the cross. Colossians 1:20 *"God made peace through the blood of Christ's death on the cross."* That is clear! If you're having a struggle with unity with somebody (another believer), one of the things that can really help is to close your eyes and in your mind's eye picture the both of you standing there at the foot of the cross looking up to Jesus Christ. Realize He died for us both. The cross, when you bring that into your relationships, when you bring that into your life, that's where peace happens in our lives. Some of you are thinking, "It's not that easy. Sometimes there's a struggle with it even with believers." That is true. I'm going to talk in a few minutes how you work in different situations when you face a struggle with unity with another believer. We need to know how to do this. This is one of the main things God made us to do as a church, to love one another. *It is a witness to the world. The effort is mine, the unity is the Spirit's, the bond of peace is the cross that God has brought into our lives.*

Principle #3 – Discover the greatness in *diversity!*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (7) But to *each one of us grace was given* according to the measure of Christ's gift. Ephesians 4:3, 7 (NKJV) Paul says to "make a great effort at "unity." Sometimes we get a little confused about the definition of unity. So, look briefly at what it isn't. Unity is not *uniformity* It would like to be sending a memo and asking everyone to wear Hawaiian shirts and no socks to church. That is uniformity if everybody dressed like that. That's not what the church is all about. If we said you all have to think exactly this way, you all have to vote exactly this way, you have to do exactly this thing, you have to get up at exactly this time and that's what makes you a believer. We all must be this way – we get ourselves into this little box. That's not the unity that the Scripture is talking about. Unity is not uniformity. Unity is not *anarchy* Anarchy is the absence or denial of any authority or established order. It is not everyone doing whatever they like. So, what is unity? Unity is a condition of *harmony*: continuity without *deviation or change* (as in purpose or action) Or in other words unity is. Unity is *planned diversity* He is given a unity of purpose. He's given us His word saying this is the direction you need to go. He's also given us a variety in the way He's made us. That's what Ephesians 4:1-13 are all about. Verses 1-8 are all about the unity that we have in purpose. Then verses 8-14 are about the diversity that we have in our gifts. He's made us one, but He's given gifts to each one. He's made us unified, but He's given us diversity. The great thing about the way the Holy Spirit does this, is it's a planned diversity. He's planned for us all to be different. He has made us in different ways. There is a

tremendous difference between planned differences and unplanned differences. The Holy Spirit has planned our differences! He is the artist. He's the weaver. He has planned our differences so that in his church as each one of us exercises our gifts according to His purpose, not our purpose! Unity comes together in our diversity to make us into something we could never be on our own. Each one of us, as we serve God here, we are something we could never be on our own, because of the planned differences God has put in our lives. Never try to be a color that you aren't. Never try to be a piece of twine that you're not. God made you a certain color. And if you're not that color – if you say, "I like that red person over there and I'm sort of a yucky yellow. I do not like my color. I am going to go be red. If you try to be red, you're just going to be out of place. Everybody's just going to say, "What's that yucky yellow person over here in the red zone?" You can't be anything different than you are. And you're going to leave a big gap where yellow needs to be. Because if you take even a yucky yellow and you put it in just the right place it shines out brightly. And it makes things look just right.

Principle #4 – Dedicate yourself to a great truth!

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. (Ephesians 4:4-6) NKJV The fourth principle you is very practical. This is where unity and purpose originate. Some people say, "What we believe isn't necessary as long as we love and respect each other." That is absurd! There must be an anchor, a standard for us to be unified about! Unity built on anything other than Biblical truth isn't unity, it's compromise. Paul lays out for us seven basic spiritual realities that unify us, that form the foundation for our unity. Paul reiterates the foundational truth the church must dedicate itself to. *We are one body!* That means whatever hurts them, hurts me. Sometimes we get into this situation where we don't want to have unity with another person in the body. So, we say, "I'm just going to get them out of my life," and we start hitting them. We are hitting ourselves. And we're thinking, "Why does this hurt so much?" We are one body. I know we go through struggles sometimes relationally but never get to the point where you want to hurt another believer. You can't hurt another believer without hurting yourself. It is impossible. We are one body. *We are one spirit!*

That means the Spirit within us agrees. Do you think you have a Holy Spirit within you saying, "I'm on your side!" and there's a Holy Spirit within the other person saying, "I'm on their side? And that the Holy Spirit is in disagreement? No way. The Holy Spirit within each of us, if we're believers, agrees. You can count on that. And He is trying to get through to us. *We have one hope!* That means we're going to spend eternity together. We can count on that. I do not want to spend eternity avoiding somebody. That's a long time to have to avoid somebody. I think we should get it straightened out while on this earth. We are going to live in eternity together. That is part of who God's made us to be. *We have one Lord!* Jesus thought about us both as He died on the cross. I think

He thought about every person He was going to die for. He saw them. He pictured us both as He died on the cross. *We have one faith!* That means we agree on the most important things. We may have a disagreement about this or that, but we do agree about the most important things in life. That's what it means to have one faith. *We have one baptism!*

We are marked by God as believers. We both have that mark on us. If the world looked at us it'd say, "Why are they disagreeing? They are twins as far as their faith." *We have one God!* We are both creative expressions of a loving God.

Principle #5 - Pursue your great gift!

However, Christ has given *each of us special abilities—* whatever he wants us to have out of *his rich storehouse of gifts.* (Ephesians 4:7) LB Paul now moves from what all Christians have in common to how Christians differ from each other. In these verses he is discussing variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. God has gifted each believer to be used for the unifying and edifying of the body.

God has gifted you. If you're a believer accept it by faith. Just as much as the Bible says He's saved you, as much as the Bible says He's going to take you to heaven, the Bible says He's gifted you and He has a place of service for you in His church. It is your responsibility to pursue the gift God has already placed within you. So how do you diligently pursue your gift if you have no idea what you gift us? How are you going to delight in what you do not know about? How do I figure it out? Don't misunderstand what I'm saying, the Holy Spirit gives them as He wills. The problem is we do not put ourselves in a place of recognizing what He has gifted us with. Because of that we have many in our churches who have not discovered their gifts that God has given them, and result is weaker church rather than a strong church. *This principle that Paul teaches us is such a critical area of development and growth of God's Kingdom shouldn't the church have an active plan help people discover their gifts, so that they can fulfill God's purpose for their lives?* Absolutely!! Let me give you some examples of how this normally works in most churches:

By trial and error. They do something for a while and find out that's not where they want to be or need to be, so they go to another place. The problem with this is the time that can be wasted by trying to find out where they fit in.. *By being available.* It is good to make yourself available, but sometimes because a person is available, they are grabbed for a particular area for which they are not suited. *By be placed on a guilt trip.* This is a common way we get people to do things. They know they need to be doing something for God, so if enough pressure is placed on them, they give in. Paul gives us the best way to help you pursue your gift: It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service...* (Ephesians 4:11, 12) NIV Many times, these verses are referred to only in the context of what the apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, the pastor, and teacher are to be to the

body, rather than what they are to do for the body. One of the primary responsibilities of the leadership of the church is provide for people to recognize their gifts. There's nothing in life more fulfilling than that – recognizing that God is using me to make a difference in somebody else's life.

Principle #6 - Become great at serving others!

...For the *work of service*, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12, 13) NASB When you decide to serve, and you decide to open this gift that God has given, you will experience a sense of fulfillment, joy, and significance like you've never experienced before in your life. That is what life is all about. It does not make you perfect. It doesn't mean you never have a depressing night again or get tired again. But it puts you on a whole new plain of living where God wants us to live. That's what the spiritual gifts are all about. If you look at Ephesians 4:13 it shows you how this thing came full circle. Remember how we started out with one and then we went to each one. We started out with our unity and then we went to our individuality. This section ends with unity again. *"Each of you has received the gift to serve others. Be good servants so if God's various gifts of grace."* Ephesians 4:13 *"We've been given these gifts so we can serve each other until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* I love that verse. It talks about God's direction and plan for His church. If you take a close look at it, we do come full circle. Our unity is built upon our individuality. *But our individuality as we exercise it builds back into our unity. It is a circle that God's built into His church. "Until we all reach unity."* It does not say we reach toward unity. It says we reach it. Until we all become mature. Not we are becoming mature, but it says we become mature. *"Until we attain the whole measure."* Not someday maybe, but when we attain it. That says there's a completed project that's going to happen in our lives because of the grace of God in our lives. He's going to finish the process of maturity in His church. We cannot just set back and wait for Him to do that. One of the ways that play into that is His church. The church as our gifts work together is part of the process that God uses to reach us towards maturity. I love the church. I love the fact that He's created this body of people in His world to let people see what Jesus is like, that He uses even our differences, that we argue and don't get along with each other and the way that we work that out to show people what Jesus Christ is like. I love being involved with you in the church. The great thing about it is this church that we have we get to spend eternity together loving the Lord and serving the Lord together. I want to challenge you to make every effort to apply these relationship principles, personally and corporately and I will guarantee you that this church will become great and have a great impact and influence in this community!



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