

Foundations of Community

Ephesians 4:1-3

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Chapter 4 is a wonderful chapter on community. I am looking forward to preaching through this chapter. Unfortunately, many people will proof text from this chapter and promote a unity that is grossly unbiblical. In our city there are people who are calling for unity, fellowship and joint ministry between liberals, evangelicals and Roman Catholics. They think that the only way that the lost in our city can be reached is if the church is united in giving a lost world the good news. They never stop to define the words “unity,” “church,” “Gospel,” “salvation” and “lost.” And let me tell you something, liberals, Roman Catholics, the emergent church and true evangelicals have wildly different definitions of what those things are. They want to get to the practice of Christianity without worrying about doctrine. As one pastor worded it, “doctrine divides, love unites.” And as we discussed his suggestions it became painfully obvious that his definition of love was not Biblical. Because he threw out doctrine, his practice became wrong. That’s why I say that the only way you can have orthopraxy is if you have orthodoxy.

I. The Foundational Pillar of Doctrine: Grounded in truth, not experience (v. 1a – “therefore”)

A. Unity not grounded in doctrine is a false unity (chapters 1-3)

Paul begins this chapter with the word “**Therefore.**” That word tightly links the doctrines of chapters 1-3 with the practice of chapters 4-6. In effect he is saying, “In light of all that I have told you about the great doctrines of the faith, I want you to now live those doctrines out in this way.” That word “therefore” shows me that Paul is grounding his teaching of community in the truths of chapters 1-3, not in experience. We tend to reverse that. We tend to picture the kind of experiences that we would enjoy and appreciate and that would make *us* feel a part of “community” and never stop to think if our definition of community is correct. The kind of community that Paul describes in chapters 1-3 is radically different from that found on the planning charts and in boardrooms of many churches.

Pastor Doug Goins said, “My first instinct in community-building is toward being an activist. I want to schedule meetings, create organizational

charts, encourage dialogue, establish a budget, hire an ombudsman, get a policy statement down on paper...” Paul says, No. The first thing you need to do is to look at the doctrine. The next thing you need to do is to appropriate God’s power. The third thing that you need to do is to adjust your attitudes to line up with God’s doctrine and power. The fourth thing you need to do is to throw off the counterfeits to community that are man-made and man-centered. And the last thing that you need to do is to engage in community building activities that he lists in this chapter. There *are* actions that we must take. And we will look at those actions. But Paul slows us down by giving us doctrinal pillars, Spiritual pillars, character pillars and the pillar of human responsibility.

B. The nature of the Trinity (see sermon series on Trinity)

Let’s look first at the pillar of doctrine. One of the doctrines that Paul speaks a great deal about in chapters 1-3 is the doctrine of the Trinity. It is the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is the model of our communities. The fact that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in their attributes and in their glory is the basis for treating all humans with equal dignity. But the fact that they are not equal in their roles leads Paul to say in these last chapters that we are not equal in our roles either. And Paul applies both sides of that coin to the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. The fact that Father delegates both responsibility and authority to the Son hugely informs us on how leaders should delegate responsibility and authority. The fact that the Father honors and empowers the Son in chapter 1 informs Paul in his chapter 5 discussion of how husbands should honor and nurture their wives. But the Son’s total submission to the Father and delight in doing the Father’s will also informs his later discussions.

I would love to go through all the ways in which the doctrine of the Trinity in chapters 1-3 informs Paul’s discussion of the various types of community in chapters 4-6. But we don’t have time, and since I have already preached an entire sermon series on the subject of the Trinity and its practical applications, I’ll just let newcomers order a copy of the five sermons on the Trinity. But we must never forget that the doctrine of the Trinity must inform our practice of community. Community does not mean mindless and mushy affections for each other. It does not mean standing up in the church and hugging a visitor and telling him that you love him. It is manifested in much more concrete and profound actions of community love that are informed from God’s law.

***C. The doctrine of the middle wall of partition
(ceremonial law) being broken down (chapter 2)***

A second major doctrine is how the middle wall of partition (which was the ceremonial law) was broken down in chapter. Jew and Gentile are one body. That informs our ideas on community. For the sake of time, I'm going to skip over that point. I think that most of the applications would be fairly obvious.

***D. The truth of our union with Christ and all the graces
that flow from that (chapter 1)***

I am having to be very selective here in which doctrines I pick, but let me briefly talk about point D. Turn to chapter 1 and I want you to notice the pervasive doctrine of the union that we have with Christ. Mike did a good job of outlining that union this morning. Look at chapter 1, verse 3: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him...** So we have "in Christ," "in Him," in verse 6 "in the Beloved," and 11 similar phrases speaking of union with Christ. Over and over Paul shows that apart from Christ we have no salvation, no blessings, no assurance and no fellowship with each other. This means that it is wrong to speak of fellowship with an unbeliever. Speak of having fun with them, yes, but there is no fellowship.

Paul is going to be showing in chapter 4 that the reason we must enjoy community with each other more and more is because you as believers are united to Christ. Do you remember Christ's statements in Matthew 25? He said, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.** But He also said the reverse: **inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these least of these my brethren, you did not do it to me.** We cannot claim to have fellowship with Christ when we do not pursue fellowship with each other and mutual ministry to each other.

Now that doctrine of union with Christ if lived out will force you to treat others as people rather than as parts of programs. It will give you a Christ centered focus on everything that you do with others. Try to consciously think of speaking to Christ when you speak to another member, or of working for Christ when you work for another individual, and it will begin to give you an attitude that will help you to enjoy true community. The doctrine of union with Christ takes church ministry completely out of the realm of machinery, statistics and organization into a personal dimension.

But another implication of union is not just how we treat others, but what we even think of community. You might think, “I don’t need community,” or “I don’t like community,” or “community doesn’t work.” But it doesn’t matter what you need, want or what works. That’s utterly immaterial. What matters is what Christ wants and what best glorifies Him. Rarely did Christ express His heart longings and desires. But one of the times that He did He said, **“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”** (Matt 23:37) Christ has a passion for gathering His children together into community. That is where His heart is at, whether your heart lines up or not. This is why it is important to start with doctrine and not with our feelings. It is what Christ desires that really matters. Our community is not based upon the fact that we like each other, agree together or have common hobbies. It does *not* flow first and foremost from *our* desires and impulses but from *Christ’s* desires. Our community is based upon the fact that we are united to Christ. Christ said, **“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”** (Matt 23:37) Look at chapter 1 verse 10. This gives Christ’s goal in history: **that in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth – in Him.** That will happen in heaven. But chapter 4 says it needs to more and more happen even now. So Paul’s **“therefore”** makes sense. Since we believe that we are united with each other by our union with Christ we must live out our beliefs by embracing those whom Christ embraced, disciplining those whom He would discipline, correcting those whom He would correct and engaging in ministry with each other as He defines.

*E. The truth of the transforming power of Christ’s grace
(1:15-2:10)*

Point E speaks of the truth of the transforming power of Christ’s grace that was given in chapter 1:15-2:10. That section gives a long description of the incredible power of Christ’s grace to change us more and more into His image. And that grace is the answer to another major objection. What is one of the greatest reasons that we have for leaving community or never entering community in the first place? It is sin. We’ve maybe been hurt by someone’s sinful actions, or words or attitudes. Maybe we have a strong disagreement like Synteche and Euodias in Philippians and it is destroying our ability to fellowship together. Or maybe it’s my own sinful pride, or anger, or impatience. But if we can be firmly convinced of the power and

reality of God's grace in each believer, it will give us a foundation to have patience with them. Pray Paul's prayer in chapter 1:15-23 when there is a person who is theologically weak, or morally immature. What a great passage for community. It says,

Ephesians 1:15 ¶ **Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,**

Ephesians 1:16 **do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:**

Ephesians 1:17 **that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,**

Ephesians 1:18 **the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,**

Ephesians 1:19 **and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power**

Ephesians 1:20 **which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,**

Ephesians 1:21 **far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.**

Ephesians 1:22 ¶ **And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,**

Ephesians 1:23 **which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

The doctrines contained in a section like that will give you a new appreciation for the fellow Christian who irritates you. Verse 19 says that the same power that raised up Christ from the grave is at work in that individual. Attitude change.

Chapter 2:1-10 reminds us that apart from grace we were all children of Satan, and **were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.** We must think, "There but for the grace of God go I. Perspective. The moment we have an "*us*" *versus* "*them*" attitude within the church you know we are forgetting that we are all worthless, depraved sinners but we also forget the power and undeservedness of Christ's grace.

F. The truth of the radical unity in the church that has been wrought by grace (2:11-3:21)

But the next section, chapter 2:11-3:21 shows us that the most offensive divisions that may exist have been torn down in the cross of Christ and therefore must be torn down in our churches. If you can think of

someone you would rather not be around because of their race, remember that verse 12 says of us Gentiles, **that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us....** The doctrines of grace in this chapter do not allow for any kinds of racial divisions in the church. But I think they apply to other kinds of divisions as well. For example, I am thankful that every age group in our church has learned to enjoy each other's company. Scripture knows nothing of affinity groups where old agers get together to the exclusion of the young or vice versa. If they want to get together for fun, that is fine, but that should never be thought of as a substitute for community. Unbelievers can achieve affinity, but only those indwelt with God's Spirit can overcome the human obstacles to achieve the radical love, fellowship and mutual ministry in which every part does its share. The Biblical concept of community is family, not a social club.

There are other doctrines in chapters 1-3 that help to correct faulty notions, but I think this outline helps to give you the general idea.

II. The Foundational Pillar of God's Power: Empowered by God, not our flesh (v. 1)

1. Paul exemplifies this power (v. 1b; 3:13)

The second foundational pillar is God's power. We'll touch on verse 3 in a moment which speaks of the "unity of the Spirit." But Paul exemplified the fact that he was empowered by God's power. Paul is not writing from an ivory tower where his theory sounds good because everything is going good for him. Verse 1 says, **I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you...** In verse 13 of the previous chapter he had said, **Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.** Paul was suffering on their behalf.

Now it's important to realize that he wasn't complaining. In fact, he sees Jesus as having put him into that jail for a good reason. He's not a prisoner of Rome. He's a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason he once again brings up this issue is to counter complaints of why community is too hard. They might complain, "But you don't know about my nagging mother-in-law. Life is hard." And Paul say, "Look, I'm in jail, and I'm still committed to living by God's power." They might appeal to the difficult

wife, and Paul can say, “Well, that’s nothing compared to the guard I’m chained to. I don’t think my guard uses Dial soap. And if he did, he certainly needs to wash his mouth out.” Paul was an example who lived what he preached.

2. He urges us to walk consistently with our calling
(v. 1c)

But verse 1 goes on to say, ... **walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.** The word “worthy” in the Greek means, fitting to, consistent with. When we fail to have the things that he will outline in chapter 4, we are failing to walk consistently with our calling. We are in denial of our calling. Martyn Lloyd Jones points out that there are two kinds of calling. There is the outward call of the Word of God, and that goes out to even the unregenerate. But the second kind of call is the inward direct call of God’s Spirit upon our souls. It was the call that drew us into salvation. It is a call that continues to sanctify us, to guide us into ministry and conform us to the image of His Son. It is His power drawing our spirits out.

And what did God call us into in chapters 1-3? Well, let’s look at it. In chapter 1:2 he called us into God’s grace and peace. That means two things: it’s available to us, and it means that grace and peace is possible in our relationships. When we lack grace and peace we are failing to walk consistently with our calling. In verse 3, He called us into multiplied spiritual blessings in Christ. When we don’t know how to sign the checkbook of heaven to receive those blessings, we are failing to walk worthy of our calling. In verse 4 he called us that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Which means that true community does not ignore holiness.

In verse 5 he called us into sonship, which means that when we exhibit the fears and insecurities of an orphan spirit, we are not walking worthy of our calling. To “walk worthily” implies an activity that we are engaged in. Paul said in Philippians, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.** We have a responsibility to work out what God is working in. You can have a powerful 45-caliber revolver in your hand, but if you don’t pull the trigger, it won’t do anything. And the same is true of the Spirit of Sonship. It is as we pull the trigger of faith and begin rejoicing in God’s presence with us that the demonic spirits who cause fears and insecurities are forced to flee and the Spirit of God cries out “Abba Father” within us. But we have a part to play. We must walk out our calling.

In verse 6 he called us into a state of being accepted. In verse 7 he calls us into the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace. When you either don't feel forgiven or you are unforgiving to others, you are not walking worthy of the richness of your calling. All of these things in chapters 1-3 that we are called into are a heritage that Paul wants us to live out by faith. He's given us the revolver. He wants us to pull the trigger. God's power is there, but we must receive it and live it by faith.

That means that the calling of chapter 1:8 helps define true community and shows that a community that isn't interested in growing in wisdom and prudence is a false unity that is failing to walk worthy of our calling.

That means that community which is all wrapped up in me, me, me and how can others serve me, hasn't taken seriously the fact that chapter 1:12 says that we were called to be to the praise of *God's* glory. One of the ironies of counseling is that people who feel miserable and want a fix for their problems won't find themselves fixed until they start forgetting about themselves and start to live out their responsibilities to each other and to God. They ironically find more wholeness as they start living out their calling that is outlined in these chapters – chapters which call us to abandon selfishness and to become servants of the most High who purchased us. We are not called to make God our servant, but we are called to be His servants.

On the other hand, when we fail to be actively engaged with the body, we are failing to live out the calling given in chapter 1:22-23, which says, **And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.** Martyn Lloyd Jones points out that this means two things: "His fullness is in the church," because he fills all things. But secondly, the phrase, "the fullness of Him" amazingly means that "we as the Church are His fullness" in the same way that a body is the completion and the fullness of the head (p. 431). Now this is such an astonishing truth, and it relates to the issue of community so profoundly, that I want to read from Martyn Lloyd Jones's commentary on chapter 1. Let me summarize a few points first. He first points out that the head is not a complete body. He then states that the body is in some sense the fullness of the head. Jones then goes on to point out that this addresses two extremes that one finds in the church. One extreme is to say that the body can do stuff without the head. But the Bible makes quite clear that we can do *nothing* without Christ. The other extreme is to say that we are just passive and the head does everything. The truth of the matter is that we must be active in everything because the head has chosen to work everything through the body, even though He needs nothing.

This is the amazing thing: He needs nothing, but He has chosen to do his cosmic purposes through the body; through the church.

Let me read from that chapter. Lloyd Jones says,

“The muscle is not isolated, it cannot do anything in and of itself; but it is alive because it is receiving energy and life from the brain through the nerve. In its normal state it is relaxed and flabby. In that state it can achieve little, if anything; it cannot enable you to lift weights, for instance. Before that muscle or group of muscles can be of value or help to us they must be exercised and developed. If we fail to exercise and develop them and simply wait for some sudden great accession of power, we shall be sadly disappointed. To develop a muscle we must exercise it. And the more we exercise the muscle, the greater will be the energy and the power supplied to it. The two things work together at the same time. We must not say that it is all from the brain, or that it is all in the muscle; the muscle makes use of the power that it receives from the brain through the nerve. The brain acts through the developed muscle.”

“What is true of the physiology of the body is equally true spiritually. The way to receive more power is to use and exercise the power you have. As a Christian you are not lifeless, you are connected to the Head. The spiritual nervous power is there in Him. You say, ‘My muscles are flabby’, I reply, ‘Exercise them’. Similarly do not wait for a sudden blessing of sanctification, do all you can, and the blessing will come. You will be conscious of greater power, and the Lord will reveal Himself to you in the power and the wonder of His might.”

“Let us never forget that ‘the energy of the strength of God’s power’ is in us because of our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Head of the body, of which we are the parts. There is no excuse for sin, there is no excuse for failure; the energy is there, and I must use it, I must exercise my faculties, and I shall then find that there is infinitely more energy available. I shall go ‘from strength to strength’, from ‘glory to glory’, until eventually I, with all other Christians, attain unto the perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

I don’t know about you, but I find this concept of the body being the fullness of Christ to be mind blowing. If Christ chooses to limit His work in history to what the church is willing to take on, it makes community an absolute imperative. There can be no passivity. There can be no waiting. And there can be no individualism. The parts of the body must work

together. We must first of all walk, and we must walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called in the first 3 chapters. If we don't, our generation will be left on the dustbin of history. I have given you a sampling of what it means to live out our calling, but if we had time we could look at every verse in chapters 1-3 and show how Christ's calling in these chapters involves the Head of the body empowering us for community and sending signals through the "nerves" to the "muscles" to be active. Paul will dive into the how's and wherefores later in this chapter, but first comes a caution:

3. He speaks of this unity as a "unity of the Spirit" (v. 3)

III. The Foundational Pillar of Character: Community is promoted by five character qualities

A. *Lowliness*

The caution is that we are to do all of this activity **with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.** Let's quickly look at each of those words. They are essential characteristics for smoothly functioning spiritual muscles.

The first essential attitude is lowliness, and this word is strengthened with the word "all." Not just some lowliness, but all lowliness. Obviously it rules out pride, as well as self-centeredness. Illus: "Walter Cronkite told a story on himself one time. He and his wife had been sailing down the Mystic River in Connecticut, going through shallow water, when a boat filled with young people started shouting and waving their arms at them. Cronkite waved back a cheery greeting. His wife knew they were trying to warn him, and said, 'Do you know what they were shouting?' He replied, 'Why it was hello Walter.' 'No,' she said. 'They were shouting, "Low water. Low water.'" We do have this tendency to reinterpret data in self-serving ways.

But this word "all lowliness" goes even further than that. It would have been a shocking term to the pagans because the ancient Greeks in the first century spoke of it with derision. They caricatured the word as "the crouching submission of a slave." Is he calling us to have the crouching attitude of a slave? Epictetus said this word meant, "having a low opinion of oneself" (3.2.14; 4.1.2; 2.9.10) and Plutarch said it meant "to be in an inferior position" or "to degrade oneself." So I like the translation "lowliness." Paul is saying that each of us should take the attitude that we are the lowest man on the totem pole. And in case you think that can't possibly be what Paul means, let me read you Philippians 2:3: **Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind**

[there's the same Greek word, now comes an amplification of what he means – “but in lowliness of mind] **let each esteem others better than himself**. Yes he does mean that we need to think of ourselves as the lowest man on the totem pole and others as better than myself. Paul is taking the word literally.

Most of the obstacles to community would be ruled out if we would take this admonition seriously. We need to stop thinking highly of ourselves. In fact, we need to stop thinking about ourselves altogether and to begin to have the attitude of a slave. Some people come into the church as users to suck others dry. Paul wants us to come into church with an attitude to serve. And I don't care how young a Christian is in the Lord, he needs to immediately be involved in some kind of ministry that reaches beyond himself. We got our kids to do chores as two year olds. They were pretty simple chores, like “take this hanky to mommy.” But you shouldn't think you will *begin* to serve once the church meets all of your needs. No. That attitude will destroy community. Lowliness or a servant's heart needs to be put on immediately after the new birth. Both complainers and users would be cured if they would ask God to daily give them lowliness of mind, the attitude of a servant, seeing others as more important than themselves. I think you can see why I say that community is a gift of God's grace. This is not something we ordinarily would do apart from grace. But since all of us are indwelt by the Spirit of God, there is no reason why we all can't have all lowliness.

B. Gentleness

The second essential in verse 2 is gentleness and in the Greek literature it is contrasted to harshness and brusqueness. You don't fit this qualification if you are gentle when everything is going well. Even a grizzly bear is gentle when it is hibernating. If there is nothing to irritate you, there is nothing to test whether you have put on the supernatural grace of gentleness. We must be gentle in our speech; gentle in our actions; gentle in our reproofs. Galatians 6 says that even when someone is caught in a serious sin that needs to be confronted, the mature people who do the confronting need to do it with gentleness. Galatians 6:1 says, **Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted**. You are much more likely to be gentle in rebuke when you realize that you are capable of falling into any sin apart from Christ's grace.

C. Longsuffering

Very quickly, longsuffering is an essential for community because community involves differences. The eye can get impatient with the ear and the foot can get impatient with the mouth. But when the grace of longsuffering or patience is at work, all can work with each other.

D. Bearing with one another

Bearing with one another. The basic meaning of the verb is to endure or to tolerate, but carries with it the idea of putting up with a lot. And he's not thinking of putting up with a lot with a negative attitude, because he modifies it with the phrase, "in love." We have to put up with a lot in each other because there is a lot that still needs to be sanctified in some people. We do it in love because we desire their best, rather than our comfort. So you can see how this would be a very important principle for community. We have got to be convinced in our minds that it is worthwhile to put up with a lot, or as some translate it, to be forbearing. It's a wonderful characteristic in any community – even family or work.

E. Love

And then finally, love. Love does not ignore the calls to holiness, nor does it ignore the sin that is present. But love is self-giving, sacrificial interest in another's welfare. People can tell when you are putting up with someone that you hate versus being forbearing with a person that you love. Knit those five characteristics together, and you have a wonderful chance of having true Biblical community

IV. The Foundational Pillar of Human Responsibility: Unity Must be diligently pursued and guarded (vv. 1, 3)

The last thing that Paul says in these three verses is **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. So the fourth pillar is the pillar of human responsibility. It takes hard work, and thus the verb for endeavoring. We've got to work at it. And the rest of the chapter is going to be talking about some of that hard work. It takes being on guard, and thus the word for "keep" or "to guard." There will always be things that will seek to destroy the unity that God calls for. Certainly Satan will do everything he can to attack community. And Paul deals with that need to guard and war in chapter 6. So we work at it and we stand guard for it.

In order to do that we must depend upon the Spirit, because this is not a worldly unity, but a unity that the Spirit Himself brings. This means that the unity is empowered by Him, but is also characterized by the things of the Spirit.

Then finally he speaks of the “bond of peace.” Here it is peace that holds unity together. In Colossians it is love that is a bond that holds unity together. There is no contradiction. Like one commentary said, if the foundation holds up a roof, so do the walls. In one sense, all the characteristics of verse 2 form a bond that holds unity together. It’s the glue of unity.

So in conclusion, my admonition is to make sure that we live out each verse of chapters 1-3 in the community that we seek. Second, that we appropriate His power to do so. Third, that we let our community be richly characterized by the graces of verse 2 and finally, that we work diligently at preserving what the spirit is doing. And may God receive all the glory for the fruits that flow from the community of this church. Amen.

I charge you to put on these four pillars: truth, power, character and diligence.