

**+ Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16 + Our Future Will Lead to Perfect Unity +
+ 4th Sunday of End Time + 15 November 2015 +**

There's nothing pleasant about a fracture. You fracture a bone and you have to deal with the pain of the injury, then a difficult recovery process. A fracture doesn't heal instantly. So you have to adjust how you do just about everything in your daily life all while protecting the bone that's slowly healing. When the cast finally comes off, the bone is never quite the same.

There's nothing pleasant about a fracture. A relationship gets fractured—a friendship, a family, a marriage—and there's tremendous pain that can last for years. The fracture doesn't heal instantly or sometimes at all. It changes your life and everyone around you from your friends to your relatives to your kids. The healing process is long and painful. Sadly for some, it never ends. Even if you do recover, you're never the same.

We live in a world where fractures happen, but we also live in a fractured world. It isn't just bones or relationships, but hostility and antagonism, sarcasm and opposition between neighbors and citizens and peoples. What once was "middle ground" has been torn apart by bitter opposition, a stubborn unwillingness to listen, and an all-too-quick willingness to attack. Have you ever made rude or angry comments about someone who differs from you politically? Have you ever made sarcastic or condescending comments about someone who comes from a different culture or a different generation or even a different religion? That's just the tip of the iceberg.

You and I don't have to look too far outside of ourselves to see how fractured our world is. On Friday night, all you had to do was go online or turn on the news to see how horrifically fractured our world really is. At least 129 dead and upwards of 350 people wounded in a major terrorist attack on the city of Paris, France. Terrorists attacked innocent human beings justifying it as punishment for France's foreign policy.

Now you could be like so many others hoping that someday people will figure out that violence isn't the answer to peace or that somehow we can all just get along. Right now on social media many show solidarity with the French like the hashtag #PrayforParis or pictures with the colors of the French flag. Yet a time will come when we move on from such outward unity. The same thing happened after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 back in 2001. You couldn't go anywhere without seeing "United We Stand," but our nation has become more fractured since then. Earthly unity doesn't last.

The truth is, in a fractured world, you will find fractured people—and every one of us in some way, shape, or form has been fractured. Maybe it's something that happened to you when you were a kid or as you grew up or when you were an adult. Maybe it's something that happened in your family or a relationship or in your marriage. Maybe it's something you did or failed to do. Maybe it's simply the fact that every one of us is born with a fractured sinful nature that wants nothing more than to get your way and what you want no matter how you get it, no matter who you step on to get it.

In the end, sin leaves you and everyone else fractured and broken not just between you and others, but between you and God. God created us to be at peace with one another and with him, but it seems like those fractures grow more and wider every day. We are opposed to others and to him—and what else can come from that than pain and difficulty and condemnation?

Now your future and mine would look pretty bleak if all that lay before us were more and wider fractures between us and loved ones, us and others, us and God. Yet that's not where our future leads. You might've looked at the theme for this sermon and scratched your head. "**Our future will lead to perfect unity?** How is that possible when we seem to be growing farther and farther apart? Is Pastor going to preach about world peace or give us 40 easy steps to unity with my difficult neighbor? How is unity possible?"

Well, my sermon isn't about world peace and I don't have 40 easy steps to unity with your difficult neighbor. The truth is, world peace and true unity are impossible among fractured people in a fractured world. Fractured people cannot put themselves back together. Sin has made that impossible.

So then why does the Apostle Paul encourage the Ephesian Christians to "**make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**"? He prefaces that by urging them to be humble and gentle, patient and bearing with each other in love, to even "**live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**" Yet he's not telling them that by their humility and gentleness, patience and love, they will somehow find true unity.

No, Paul points his fellow believers to the only Source of true unity—their **“one Lord”** Jesus Christ. **“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. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”** Paul could encourage his readers to **“keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”** because God the Holy Spirit had called them to **“one faith”** in the **“one Lord”** Jesus Christ.

Through the Gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit had taken sinful, fractured people, who had been breaking farther and farther away from the holy God, and had formed them into one united body of Christ. They had heard the Word of God and come to know real hope in their Savior Jesus. With **“one baptism”** they had been cleansed of their sins and brought to saving faith in Jesus. So rather than serve themselves, they served the One who had been **“completely humble and gentle...”** for their sake in spite of their natural arrogance and aggression. They served the Savior who had been **“patient”** with them not just putting up with them and their fractured lives, but bearing the burden of their sins on the cross out of nothing less than self-sacrificing love for their fractured souls.

Through the Gospel work of the Holy Spirit, these Ephesian Christians had **“one Lord”**—not countless lords. They were part of **“one body”** of Christ—not fractured pieces, and they had **“one faith”**—not countless, selfish opinions. To help them continue to grow together as a united body of Christ, the Lord provided them with faithful Gospel proclaimers. **“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”**

Those faithful Gospel proclaimers were sent to the body of Christ to establish and build unity through the study of God’s Word. Their task was to help these fractured souls grow into a unified body. Their God-given goal was **“to prepare God’s 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.”**

With growing maturity in God’s Word, neither the storms of false teaching nor the deceit of false teachers would cause new fractures among God’s people. Instead, with Christ as their head, **“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.”** Working together, they would grow together until finally in heaven, they would have perfect unity in Christ.

If you look back on the history of the Christian church, if you look at the confessing Christian church today, it’s amazing to see what the Holy Spirit accomplishes through the Gospel. The same ancient message of a Savior from crumbling self-righteousness and devastating guilt and destructive death is proclaimed to fractured souls like yours and mine—and Jesus brings healing no matter your age, no matter your gender, no matter the amount and distribution of melanin pigment in your epidermis (the color of your skin).

Jesus heals a soul fractured with guilt with the healing balm of his forgiveness through his own innocent blood—and then Jesus makes them part of his body. Jesus heals a soul fractured with fear with the healing balm of confidence—not in self, but in the Savior of the nations—and then Jesus makes them part of his body. Jesus heals a soul fractured with anger or violence with the healing balm of peace—not as the world gives, but from the One who has overcome the world and even death itself—and then Jesus makes them part of his body. Jesus heals a soul fractured with pain or grief with the healing balm of comfort that dries tears and revives the soul—and then Jesus makes them part of his body. Jesus heals your fractured soul and mine—and he makes us parts of his body. Rather than fractured, splintered souls flying in every direction, Jesus forms one body. He’s the head. He knows what’s best. So he unites us—no matter your age, no matter your gender, no matter the amount and distribution of melanin pigment in your epidermis—and he does what no one else in our world can do. He brings together people of every language, nation, and tribe, of every age, social status, and family background into one body.

That’s what’s stunning about the Christian church. It’s the one place in the entire world where you can have people who would normally be enemies on either side of a bottomless fracture instead form one body of Christ. Yet this side of heaven, we won’t see that beautiful reality in all its fullness. We all still have sinful natures that want your way or the highway. There are many who are **“blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”** Unity this side of heaven is impossible unless we **“speak the truth in love,”** unless we establish unity through the study of God’s Word before expressing it.

That's one of the reasons the Lord provides pastors and teachers—***“to prepare God's 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...”*** All things considered, their work is never done. So more pastors and teachers need to be raised up and trained and sent.

All of that will continue until we reach the perfect glories of heaven. Remember the theme of the sermon, **Our Future Will Lead to Perfect Unity?** That wasn't a lie. Someday we and all believers in Christ will have perfect unity as we gather around the throne of the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus. Until then, we go back daily to the healing balm of our Savior Jesus. Again and again he heals our fractured souls and enables us to ***“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”***

We live in a fractured world, but in Christ, we have a future that will one day lead to perfect unity. In him we find healing. In him we find real peace. Lord, bring your healing to our hearts and to our world. Amen.