

# *Alive in* **CHRIST**

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ”*

- Ephesians 2v 4-5



## **Session #4: Keeping the Unity of The Spirit**

Ephesians Chapter 4 verses 1-16

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

[www.sladebrook.org.uk](http://www.sladebrook.org.uk)

## **Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:**

In 6 chapters, the book of Ephesians reveals some of the richest truths in Scripture. The Apostle Paul, who wrote the letter to the Christians in Ephesus, could, it seems, barely contain his excitement as he told them all about the wonders of what God has done in Christ. Blending high spiritual realities with practical ways in which Christians are called to live them out, the Ephesian letter exhorts Christians throughout history to look again at what it really means to be alive in Christ.

The New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce said about Ephesians; “it sums up in large measure the leading themes of the Pauline writings... but it does more than that; it carries the thought of the earlier letters forward to a new stage.” It is as though Paul’s appreciation of the gospel that so radically transformed his life has scaled new heights: So that even within the confines of his roman captivity, the apostle is able, under inspiration, to transcend his circumstances and celebrate all that God has provided for him within the heavenly realms.

As we look at this letter, the aim is not only to understand more of its contents, but to apply its teachings to our own lives. With topics ranging from the spiritual reality of heavenly blessings and the importance of church unity, to effective Christian witness and spiritual warfare, Ephesians touches on essential areas of the Christian life.

We must learn to engage with these heavenly themes if we are to understand what it means to be alive in Christ. The more we learn to appreciate the great truths that underpin our salvation, the more we learn to appreciate Jesus and just how much He loves us. Once we realise what Christ has done for us, we can look beyond our own struggles and circumstances and hold on to everything that God, in His rich mercy and because of His great love, has forever blessed us with.

## **Alive in Christ #4: Keeping the Unity of The Spirit**

Christian unity is constantly under attack. According to David in Psalm 133 unity is good. It is pleasant. It is the place where God's soothing fragrance descends, like oil running down the priestly beard of Aaron. Most significantly however, is the pertinent phrase that draws this lovely picture to a close: Beyond goodness, beyond pleasantness, it is the place of divine breakthrough: *"For there the Lord bestows his blessing."* Psalm 133v 3

Having described the incredible spiritual blessings that belong to every Christian in the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul now turns his attention to how, practically, we can express them in our daily lives. Paul's own example was hard to argue with. Having described himself as *"less than the least of all saints"* in 3v 8, he exhorted the church to safeguard the unity they had in Christ by being, *"completely humble and gentle."* 4v2. This, he says, befits a church that cannot be shaken by disagreement and schism. Patience is also required as we learn to bear with one another in love.

The church is a diverse body, full of different theologies, personalities, preferences and styles. Humanly speaking, it is difficult to imagine any cohesion within such a technicolor community! However, Paul points out how radical unity looks among the people of God: There is one body. The very thing Christ has brought about and Paul has already described now needs to be seen.

Paul talks about the need for humility and not to seek after our own needs, or preferences. We should promote those of others over our own. He then celebrates the diversity of gifts within the body: Crucial to avoid man-made control and conformity. Unity is best seen in the midst of diversity, reflecting the reality of body life. The Apostle then highlights the need for activity: works of service are expected from all who are alive in Christ. This also promotes unity; when every member plays its part, the body functions healthily, without overburdening the few. Finally, maturity is the ultimate aim: If we are to keep the unity of the Spirit, we too must examine our attitudes and actions and, with the Holy Spirit's help, become more like Christ as a healthy reflection of all He has done for us.

**Read: Ephesians Chapter 4 verses 1-16**

**True unity starts with humility: 4 v 1-3**

*Paul's own example calls for a similar attitude in all Christians*

**True unity celebrates our diversity: 4 v 7-11**

*Church is not conformist, but a reflection of everyone Christ has saved*

**True unity promotes body activity: 4 v 12; v16**

*Paul prays that the Ephesians will understand what God has done*

**True unity leads to maturity: 4 v 13-16**

*Ultimately, it is only as we grow more like Christ that true unity results*

**Alive in Christ:**

**Discuss:**

*What strikes you about this section of Paul's letter?*

*How united a church is Sladebrook? How do we measure our unity?*

*What is the unity of the Spirit? How would you try and describe it?*

*Paul lists the offices of the church that have been graciously given to prepare God's people to serve effectively as a united church. Look at the list: Do you know how each office is meant to function?*

*Do we see these offices in the church today? Should we?*

*How should they operate if we are to fully prepare for what God has for His people?*

**Pray:**

*Ask the Lord to preserve the unity of the church. Pray that Christ will be seen as head of His church and that nothing would hinder that.*

**Respond:**

*How can you personally seek to uphold the unity of the Spirit at Sladebrook? Do you need to be reconciled to anyone? Is your attitude right? Think about how, this week, you can seek to resolve any issue and uphold the unity of the Spirit.*