

Christian unity is much more (and much different than) celebrating Christmas together. It cannot be created by organizational union, or united prayer and praise. Unity exists among true believers by the redemptive work of God in Christ Jesus. But for that reason believers must also work at unity. There are four requirements in Ephesians 4 to foster and experience true Christian unity.

**I. A redemption shaped spirit (4:1–3)**

1. The idea of a redemption-shaped spirit comes from the phrase “to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” in verse 1. The “calling” is explained in chapters 1–3.
2. Paul describes that redemption-shaped spirit in verses 2–3 with a series of words and phrases: humility, gentleness (cf. Matt 11:29; Col 3:12; Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:25), patience (cf. Gal 5:22–23), bearing with one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Mat 5:9).

Believers move toward the unity to which God calls them only when their hearts have been molded and shaped by the glory of their redemption in Jesus Christ.

**II. A unifying calling (4:4–6)**

Part of the glory of the church (3:31) is the unity which God has created. It is the basis for practical unity and helps define with whom we can experience true unity. Seven elements form the basis of that spiritual unity.

1. *One body*: the Body of Christ, the true or "invisible" Church, composed of all true believers since Pentecost (cf. 1:10, 22–23; 2:14–16; 3:6; 4:15–16, 25; 5:23–33; Rom 12; 1 Cor 10:14–17; 12; Col 2 & 3).
2. *One Spirit*: the Holy Spirit who lives in the Church (1 Cor 3:16) and in each true believer (1 Cor 6:19; Rom 8:9), who gives common direction (Gal 5:25), and who produces the same fruit (Gal 5:18–21).
3. *One hope of your calling*: cf. 1 Pet 1:3; Tit 1:2; 1 Cor 15; Col 1:27.
4. *One Lord*: who is Jesus Christ, the head of the body (v.15), giver of gifts (vv.7–11), standard of maturity (v.13), and sole master and source of growth (vv.15–16).
5. *One faith*: the same content of belief (Jude 3) and the same sole trust in Christ alone for salvation by grace alone.
6. *One baptism*: in this context, it is the baptism with the Holy Spirit by which Jesus Christ unites all believers into one body (1 Cor 12:12–13).
7. *One God and Father*: who is Father of all true believers, sovereign and transcendent, and operating throughout His creation.

Only true believers share these seven elements of spiritual unity and thus can truly practice unity.

**III. Divine gifting (4:7–13)**

We could not grow in unity apart from the enablement of God.

1. *Jesus Christ gifts each believer to enable all believers to walk in unity (4:7–10).*
2. *Jesus Christ has given some individuals as gifts to the whole Body to enable all believers to grow together in their giftedness and live in unity (4:11–13).*
  - a. Five special gifts to the whole Body work toward unity (v.11): those who were authorized witnesses and representatives of Jesus, those who were recipients of revelation from God who with the apostles were foundational for the church, those who are proclaimers of the gospel, and those who as pastors and teachers proclaim, explain, and apply the Word.
  - b. Christ gave these gifts to equip every believer for service which in turns builds a unified body (v.12).
  - c. Christ gave these gifts to bring the body to a maturity which is marked by unity (v.13).

Unity is dependent upon people having truly trusted Christ as Lord and Savior and then being brought under the whole counsel of God. Growth in unity is strengthened through reliance upon that which God provides through other believers.

**IV. A Christ-centered focus (4:14–16)**

1. *Christ is the means for mature unity (4:14–15a).*

Unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ brings a stable maturity (4:14). Christ's truth lived out in Christ's love promotes growth (4:15a).

2. *Christ is the goal of mature unity.*

Believers are to grow up in all aspects into Christ. The more we are like Jesus, the more we will experience unity. The Body (believers) is to submit to the Head who is Jesus. The goal of mature unity is to have Christ clearly functioning as Head.

3. *Christ is the source by which the whole body and each member grows together.*

Each believer must do his or her part, but all the growth comes from Christ (v.16). He assures that the parts of the Body are joined and held together; He gives the grace for each part to work properly; He is the source of love through which the Body builds itself up (cf. 1 John 4:7, 19).

When the parts of the body relate properly to the Head, the body matures. Each part is needed. Therefore, we should care that our brothers or sisters in Christ are spiritually healthy.

True unity in the church can only be among true believers. Unity is growing up into Christ. Unity is possible and will grow when we conform to the will of Christ. True spiritual unity is available in Christ, made possible through Christ, and intended for the glory of God in Christ.