Greek Word Studies:

Unity (1775) (henotes from heí = one + henós = of one) speaks of unanimity. It describes a state of oneness or of being in harmony and accord (cf similar Greek word Homothumadon which is a "key word" describing the first church in the Acts of the Spirit - see notes below discussing this great word).

Henotes does not describe an external, ecclesiastical union, but internal, spiritual unity. It means that Christians should be united in temper and affection, and not be split up in factions and parties (See discussion of Homothumadon). The Spirit in the Body has created a basic unity (our position in the Body because of the oneness wrought by the New Covenant) that nothing can destroy, even though believers can still behave (our experience) as if this fact is not true. And so Paul pleads for the saints at Ephesus (and all saints) to "burn" with zeal to guard the unity which Christ bought at Calvary and to live at peace with one another.

Jesus command His disciples (and us today) to manifest the sweet aroma of oneness

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34)

Then Jesus prayed for this oneness of the Spirit in John 17

I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. 22 "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; (John 17:20-22)

And here in Ephesians, Paul says that the Father has answered the prayer of His Son and created a Body characterized by oneness (a positional truth, immutable, but one that must be acted upon). Now enabled by the Spirit, the members of that Body are to be diligent to produce the experiential fruit of that oneness (See the NT "one anothers") so that the lost see and God is greatly glorified! How is the unity, oneness, koinonia, homothumadon in your local church? May our Father grant us the enabling power from His Spirit, so that we fight for unity (that's a paradoxical statement for sure!), for the glory of the Lamb. Amen

The Amplified Version helps us see our need to depend on the Spirit Who made us one in Christ to now keep us one in Christ...

Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of [and produced by] the Spirit in the binding power of peace.

Unity is not uniformity. Unity comes from within and is a spiritual grace, while uniformity is the result of pressure from without.

The only other NT use of henotes is found in Eph 4:13-note and there are no uses in the Septuagint.

O'Brien has an interesting and convicting comment on unity...

Ultimately, the unity and reconciliation that have been won through Christâ€™s death (Eph 2:14â€“18) are part and parcel of Godâ€™s intention of bringing all things together into unity in Christ ("summing up of all things in Christ" - see Eph 1:9, 10). Since the Church (Christ's Body) has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of His goodness and the pattern on which the reconciled universe of the future will be modeled (see Eph 2:7), believers are expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep this unity must mean to maintain it visibly. If the UNITY OF THE SPIRIT is real, it must be transparently evident, and believers have a responsibility before God (Ed: And we have the enabling power from the self-same Spirit) to make sure that this is so. To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do despite (injury) to the gracious reconciling work of Christ (Ed: And to His Gospel - see preceding discussion of Jesus' command and prayer for oneness). It is tantamount to saying that His sacrificial death by which relationships with God and others have been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, are of no real consequence to us! (The Letter to the Ephesians Pillar New Testament Commentary- Peter T. O'Brien) (Bolding added)

We see this unity like a sweet aroma permeating the early church...
Acts 1:14 (Context is actually before the official birth of the church but clearly is a beautiful example of unity of believers and also is an answer to Jesus’ petition for unity in John 17:22) These all with one mind (homothumadon from homos = one and the same + thumos = temperament, mind) were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind (homothumadon from homos = one and the same + thumos = temperament, mind) in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul (psuche); and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them.

Comment: Sometimes we meet someone, and before a word is spoken we sense a oneness with him or her. If we are true believers, we share a fundamental unity in the core of our beings. This inner greatness also produced a unity of soul. ἅτισιν ᾧ ὑμῶν All the believers were one in mind. They shared the same basic mental focus and thought about many of the same things. This came about as the fundamental, inarticulate unity of their hearts effervesced upward into their souls! They were truly soul brothers and sisters. This was the greatest, most profound, most satisfying unity the world has ever seen! As a result, there was no division. This was astounding because, just a few days before, when 3,000 were converted, they came from everywhere! This does not mean these believers saw everything eye to eye. It is wrong to suppose, as sadly some do, that when believers dwell in unity they will carry the same Bible, read the same books, promote the same styles, educate their children the same way, have the same likes and dislikes “that they will become Christian clones. The fact is, the insistence that others be just like us is one of the most disunifying mind-sets a church can have because it instills a judgmental inflexibility that hurls people away from the church with lethal force. One of the wonders of Christ is that he honors our individuality while bringing us into unity. (from Hughes, R. K. Acts)

Acts 5:12 And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord (homothumadon from homos = one and the same + thumos = temperament, mind) in Solomon’s portico.

Acts 15:25 it seemed good to us (the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch v22), having become of one mind (homothumadon from homos = one and the same + thumos = temperament, mind), to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

Comment: It was the believers’ great unity that enabled the spread of the gospel. That bonded band of brothers and sisters conquered the world’s followers who sailed the oceans and marched the continents to both throne and dungeon. You can mark it down - When there is great unity, the church is “great” and greatly used by God!

The final NT use of the great unity word homothumadon is found in Romans where Paul prays...

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; 6 that with one accord (NIV = “a spirit of unity”) (homothumadon from homos = one and the same + thumos = temperament, mind) you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ro 15:5-6-note)

Comment: Paul is not praying that we see everything ”eye to eye” but rather that we regard one another with minds that are filled with and focused on one Lord - Ep 4:5-note

John alluded to the unity of believers when he wrote...

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1John 1:6-7)

King David painted a beautiful word picture of this unity in Psalm 133 writing...

Behold, how good and how pleasant (acceptable, beautiful) it is for brothers to dwell together in unity (Hebrew יָחַד which emphasizes a plurality in unity!). It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming
down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever. (Psalm 133:1-3)

Comment: David recalled a scene with obvious affection—the high priest being anointed with oil. He remember the oil poured over his head, running down his beard and onto his robes and he used this picture to poetically portray how unity overflows to others -- a picture he portrays as wonderfully refreshing.

The Puritan Thomas Brooks rightly stated...

Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous."

John Calvin once said that...

The unity of His servants is so much esteemed by God, that He will not have His glory sounded forth amidst discords and contentions.

The deadly effect of disunity illustrated...

Two battleships met in the night and began to attack each other. In the conflict, a number of crewmen were severely wounded, and both vessels were damaged. As daylight broke, the sailors on the ships discovered to their amazement that both vessels flew the English flag.

Many years earlier, just before the battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the British naval hero Lord Nelson learned that an admiral and a captain in his fleet were not on good terms. Sending for the two men, he placed the hands of the admiral and the captain together. Then, looking them both in the face, he said, "Look yonder is the enemy!"

Barnes rightly states that...

there is always danger of discord where men are brought together in one society. There are so many different tastes and habits; there is such a variety of intellect and feeling; the modes of education have been so various, and the temperament may be so different, that there is constant danger of division. Hence the subject is so often dwelt on in the scriptures, See [1Co 2:1], seq. and hence there is so much need of caution and of care in the churches (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

In His high priestly prayer Jesus in John 17 prayed for unity, John recording...

"I do not ask in behalf of these alone (Jesus now prays for all believers of all generations), but for those also who believe in Me through their word (the written message of the apostles - the Word of God); 21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that (here is the great purpose of Christian unity) the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. (From this petition it is clear that the propagation of the gospel of Christ is bound up for better or for worse with the degree of unity we display to the world. Christian unity is of the utmost importance!) 22 And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected (the idea of completeness not perfection) in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (John 17:20-23)

Comment: In John 17:17 Jesus emphasized that the critical importance of truth, the adherence to truth forming a firm foundation for Christian unity. Observe that the unity of believers with each other is compared with the perfect unity which the Son has with the Father. Such unity cannot be legislated or produced by the mechanics of an organization. It is produced and maintained by the Holy Spirit. These verses are misapplied by many who advocate a worldwide, ecumenical movement, with no regard for doctrinal heresies that exist in various sects and groups. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous.

Undoubtedly you have heard the famous quote by Augustine (others credit a man named Rupertus Meldenius with this quote)...

In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity. (I would add that if we cannot experience unity in diversity, there is no possibility of unity, for all believers differ in many ways).

Morris observes that...
the only references to Christian "unity" in the New Testament--in so far as the word itself is concerned--are here in this chapter. "The unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13) is vital, but so is "the unity of the Spirit." There can be no real spiritual unity without doctrinal unity, and vice versa. In one sense, the two are synonymous because sound doctrine includes the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His fruit produced in the lives of true believers (1 Corinthians 1:10). (Morris, Henry: Defenders Study Bible. World Publishing)

Ruth Paxson adds that...

If someone asked what is the first essential of the Christian's walk, it would seem most fitting to say it was holiness. Did God not choose us in Christ that we should be holy? Then is not holiness the fundamental essential in the Body of Christ? The divine order in Ephesians is otherwise, and God's order can never be reversed.

Eph 4:2-16 shows that the first characteristic of a worthy walk is unity. What is the primary necessity for wholeness and health in a human body? It is the harmonious functioning of all the organs of the body; the perfect co-ordination in action of every part with every other part. A displacement of even an insignificant organ or the maladjustment of any parts of the body can cause disease and disability. A missionary in China began to have convulsions. She had the best of medical attention. She was told she had an incurable disease and advised to go home. On the way back to her station she consulted an osteopath. Two little bones were found to be out of adjustment, which caused pressure on the nerves. Quickly they were brought into unity through adjustment, and the incurable disease was cured.

So in the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, spiritual health is dependent upon the harmonious functioning of all the members and upon their perfect co-ordination in action. But what awful maladjustments we see in Christ's Body to-day! What sinful failure in co-ordination between its members! What shameful divisions over secondary matters which dishonor the Lord in the sight of the world! How desperately we need to come back to the divine standard set in Ephesians, and how humbly we need to acknowledge our failure and sin in not living according to it!

The Divine Standard - The unity to which God is calling His Church is distinctly defined and definitely declared. It is not a union of denominations or a federation of the churches of Christendom. Neither is it the unity of the Body. God nowhere asks us to make or to maintain the unity of the Body, for that is God's task. Through baptism with the Spirit the believer is united to Christ, the Head, and to every other member of the Body in an indissoluble bond, which unity is maintained by the indwelling Spirit. So with the making and keeping of the unity of the Body we have nothing to do. (Ed: While I agree the unity is supernatural [it "making" is all from God] and the Body will be preserved by God, nevertheless the NT is replete with passages that sound a similar call, a charge for believers to "be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit," something we can do only with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit! Perhaps this is simply a difference of semantics, but I think Paxson's comment is not entirely accurate.) But with the outworking of God's eternal purpose for the completion of the Body; for its edification and sanctification; and for its manifestation of Christ in glory and power to the world, we have much to do, which requires the harmonious, effectual working of every member. Hence God's call to keep the unity which He now defines. (Ruth Paxson -The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian - Pdf)

Of the Spirit (4151) (pneuma) is what is known as subjective genitive (possessive case) indicating that the Source or Agent producing the unity is the Holy Spirit. Paul is describing the unity which is wrought by the Holy Spirit.

If one considers the fruit of the Spirit, it is reasonable to see how His production of supernatural fruit can help preserve the unity of which He is the Author...

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22-note, Gal 5:23-note)

Comment: Note the similarity of this list to the attitudes and actions in which Paul is imploring saints to continually walk! Contrast the fruit of the flesh, especially "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying", any one of which can disrupt the unity of the body

Barnes writes the bond of peace refers to...
the cultivation of that peaceful temper which binds all together. The American Indians usually spoke of peace as a "chain of friendship" which was to be kept bright. The meaning here is, that they should be bound or united together in the sentiments and affections of peace. It is not mere external unity; it is not a mere unity of creed; it is not a mere unity in the forms of public worship; it is such as the Holy Spirit produces in the hearts of Christians, when he fills them all with the same love, and joy, and peace in believing. The following verses contain the reasons for this. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

McGee writes that since we have all been baptized into one body (1Cor 12:13) believers...

are to keep the unity which the Holy Spirit has made. We cannot make that unity. We cannot join into an ecumenical movement to force a kind of unity. Only the Holy Spirit makes the unity, but we are to maintain it. All true believers in Christ Jesus belong to one body, and we should realize that we are one in Christ. (McGee, J V: Thru the Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson) (Bolding added)

There is a wonderful story about Harry Ironside which illustrates the beauty of the unity of the Spirit among believers...

Harry Ironside once fell sick while in the midst of a series of meetings in Minneapolis and was forced to return home to California by train, which was the best mode of transportation in those days. He could barely stand. So the porter made up a lower berth for him and allowed him to recline there throughout the day. The first morning he opened his Bible and began to read it as part of his devotions. A stout German woman happened by and stopped when she saw the Bible.

"Vat's dat? A Bible?" she asked.

"Yes, a Bible," Ironside replied.

"Vai," she said, "I vill get my Bible and we vill haf our Bible reading together."

A short time later a tall gentleman came by and asked,

"Vat are you reading?"

He was a Norwegian.

He said, "I tank I go get my Bible too."

Each morning these three met, and others collected. Ironside wrote that once there were twenty-eight people and twenty-eight Bibles and that the conductor would go through the train, saying,

"The camp meeting is beginning in car thirteen. All are invited."

It was a great experience. At the end of the trip, as the cars divided up in Sacramento, some to go north and some south, the German woman asked,

"A denomination are you?"

Ironsode replied, "I belong to the same denomination that David did."

"Vat vas dat? I didnâ€™t know dat David belonged to any denomination."

Ironsode said,

"David wrote that he was a companion of all them that fear God and keep his precepts."

The woman said,

"Yah, yah, dat is a good church to belong to."
A sad example of failure to preserve the unity of the Spirit...

Two congregations located only a few blocks from each other in a small community decided to become one united, and thus larger and more effective, body instead of two struggling churches. But the merger did not happen because they could not agree on how to recite the Lord’s prayer. One group wanted “forgive us our trespasses,” while the other demanded “forgive us our debts.”

The Puritan John Trapp wrote that...

Unity without verity is no better than conspiracy.

In his well known devotional classic The Pursuit of God, A W Tozer asked...

Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship. (The Pursuit of God)

C H Spurgeon had these comments on unity...

"To remain divided is sinful! Did not our Lord pray, that they may be one, even as we are one"? (John 17:22). A chorus of ecumenical voices keep harping the unity tune. What they are saying is, "Christians of all doctrinal shades and beliefs must come together in one visible organization, regardless... Unite, unite!" Such teaching is false, reckless and dangerous. Truth alone must determine our alignments. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous. Our Lord’s prayer in John 17 must be read in its full context. Look at verse 17: “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.” Only those sanctified through the Word can be one in Christ. To teach otherwise is to betray the Gospel. (Charles H. Spurgeon, The Essence of Separation)

It is not likely we should all see eye to eye. You cannot make a dozen watches all tick to the same time, much less make a dozen men all think the same thoughts. But still, if we should all bow our thoughts to that one written Word, and would own no authority but the Bible, the church could not be divided. It could not be cut in pieces as she now is. We come together when we come to the Word of God.

A plague upon denominationalism! There should be but one denomination. We should be de-nominated by the name of Christ, as the wife is named by her husband’s name. As long as the church of Christ has to say, “My right arm is Episcopalian, my left arm is Wesleyan, my right foot is Baptist, and my left foot is Presbyterian,” she is not ready for the marriage. She will be ready when she has washed out these stains, when all her members have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (see note Ephesians 4:5)

Louis Berkhof wrote that...

Church unity is internal; church union, external. The former is the result of spiritual and organic growth; the latter is to a great extent the product of the organizing activity of men.

A university professor yearly would conduct an experiment for his class which is a wonderful illustration of the unity of the Spirit...

On an oak table was placed a pile of horseshoe nails. In one corner of the room was a powerful dynamo. When
the electric current was turned on and the poles of the battery were brought up under the table, although they
did not touch the nails themselves, immediately there was constituted around them a field of magnetic force. So
long as this field of force was maintained the loose horseshoe nails could be built up in various forms, such as
a cube, a sphere, or an arch. So long as the current was on, the nails would stay in exactly the form placed, as if
they had been soldered together. But the second the current was cut off, the nails would fall into a shapeless
mass. What that field of magnetic force was to those nails, the Holy Spirit is to all believers. By His power we
are held together in a bond of love, a bond that is broken when we grieve and quench the Holy Spirit by our
self-willed actions. Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Our Daily Bread has a devotional dealing with the Spirit of unity...

During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the
Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier
time. Those who did not, faced harsh persecution. In almost every family of those who resisted, someone died
in a concentration camp.

When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension.
Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For
several days, each person spent time in prayer, examining his own heart in the light of Christ’s commands. Then they came together.

Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there, "What did you do then?" he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred.

When love prevails among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, it presents to the world an
indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ. (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids,
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A little humor regarding “unity”...

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn’t.
"What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?” asks Linus.

"These five fingers,” says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single
unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?” asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys
get organized like that?” (Charles Schultz - writer of the comic strip Peanuts)

Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon together when all of a sudden both sides were filled
with Native American warriors on horses, dressed for battle. The Lone Ranger turned to Tonto and asked,
"What are we going to do?” Tonto replied, "What you mean 'we,' Whiteman?” (Edward Dobson, In Search of
Unity, p. 20-27)

There can be union without unity - You may tie the tails of a cat and a dog together by a rope and have union,
but you surely don’t have unity!
"Copy and paste the address below into your web browser in order to go to the original page which will allow you to access live links related to the material on this page - these links include Scriptures (which can be read in context), Scripture pop-ups on mouse over, and a variety of related resources such as Bible dictionary articles, commentaries, sermon notes and theological journal articles related to the topic under discussion."

http://www.preceptaustin.org/ephesians_42-3.htm#unity