

Keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace

Ephesians 4:1-6

Ephesians 4:1-6 – *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.”*

Background Notes

The broad outline of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is easy to remember: the first three chapters are doctrinal and the last three chapters are practical. Or, if you like alliteration, chapters 1 to 3 have to do with Doctrines for Christians, and chapters 4 to 6 have to do with Duties for Christians. Chapters 1 to 3 have to do with our Calling in Christ, and chapters 4 to 6 have to do with our Conduct for Christ.

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (v1).

“...therefore... walk worthy.” In other words, in view of the truth of our position and standing in Christ that was presented in the chapters 1-3, now walk worthy of that calling. The word “walk” is used seven times in the book of Ephesians. Our walk has to do with our conduct. In view of our great calling in Jesus Christ, our conduct should be godly.

How is your conduct, by the way? Is your conduct godly in private, when no one is watching? Is your conduct godly in reference to other believers? Is your conduct godly as you walk in this world, where it is so easy to become defiled? If our conduct is godly, we will be endeavoring to obey the big point in this passage: keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Doctrinal Point

Believers should keep the unity of the Spirit in peace.

In verses 2 and 3, we have an *appeal* for Christian unity, and in verses 4 through 6, we have the basis for Christian unity.

a. **An appeal for Christian unity** (v2-3). *“With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* Notice what verse 3 does not say. It does not say that believers are to form the unity of the Spirit. Why not? Because the unity of the Spirit is already formed. All

believers are already one in Christ. We don't form the unity of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit has brought all believers into the one body of Christ.

We are not told to form the unity of the Spirit, but we are told to work hard to keep the unity of the Spirit – not to form the unity of the *body*, but rather to keep the unity of the *Spirit*. We are not commanded to get involved in an ecumenical movement to form one world church, but we are commanded to keep the unity of the Spirit. How do we do that? Verses 4-6 indicate that we are to “*recognize the oneness of the body*.” That goes a long way towards keeping the unity of the Spirit.

We need to start with ourselves, and work on our relationships with other believers. We are to relate to others with all lowliness and humility (v2). Do you picture yourself as a major body part in the body of Christ, or do you see yourself as “just” a toe, or the little finger? Good question, isn't it? We like to think that we're humble - but are we? *Really?*

“With all lowliness and gentleness...” Am I characterized by gentleness, or meekness? Meekness is not the same as weakness. Being meek doesn't mean we're like jellyfish, with no backbone. No! Our Lord was meek and gentle. Meekness is the character quality that comes from a mind and spirit that are kept under control.

We move out from ourselves to our relationship with other believers: “*with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love*.” Are you patient with other believers? Are you “long-suffering”? What about those other believers who have talked behind your back? Have you verbally retaliated, or are you longsuffering and patient?

What about the next characteristic: “*bearing with one another in love*.” To forbear with one another is not always easy to do, and to do it with love is really hard at times. Right now, a couple of my students are stretching me to the limits of forbearance! But we must practice verse 2 if we are going to move on to verse 3.

Before we can even hope to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the four graces of verse 2 must be practiced in our lives: lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, forbearing with one another in love.

b. The basis of Christian unity (v 4-6).

“*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.*” Recognizing the unity of the body goes a long way towards keeping the unity of the Spirit. How do we recognize the oneness of the body? In verses 4-6, we have a seven-fold “oneness” of our unity: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. One person of the Trinity is mentioned in each one of these verses: the Father (v6), the Son (v5), and the Holy Spirit (v4).

Let's think of these three verses as three concentric circles (like a target), or spheres. Label the outside sphere the sphere of *subscription*. Label the middle sphere the sphere of *profession*, and label the inner sphere the sphere of *possession*. All three spheres are necessary for Christian unity, and they form the basis of Christian unity.

Let's start with the outer sphere, the sphere of subscription (v6): *"one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all."* God is Creator of all. He has authority over all, sustains all, and is in control of all. His presence is everywhere. He is transcendent and immanent at the same time. People who call themselves Christians must subscribe to these truths - but there must be more than just the sphere of subscription. A person could subscribe to all of these facts and still not be a Christian!

Next, we move to the middle sphere, the sphere of profession (v5): *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism."* One Lord -- a Christian is one who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord - not just a great teacher or leader, but as Lord! Romans 9:10 says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." One faith -- Jude 3 says that the faith was once for all delivered to the saints. We may defer on the interpretation of some passages, but there is one basic content of faith. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says, *"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures."* There is the basic content of the faith -- "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."

One baptism - is this water baptism or spirit baptism? I believe it is water baptism, because we are here in the sphere of profession. Of course, water baptism symbolizes what the Spirit has done in our lives. Notice that it is not one mode of baptism but one baptism - when we are baptized, we are publicly confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives.

But there must also be that third inner sphere in Christianity, the sphere of possession, because people can subscribe to the outer sphere (one God), and even profess to the middle sphere, and yet not be true believers. There are many professing Christians who have undergone baptism who are not truly saved. So, there must be that inner sphere of verse 4: *"There is one body and one spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling."* Only true believers are in the one body of Christ. Only true believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Only true believers have the hope of being with the Lord in glory forever.

In this first section of Ephesians 4 we've had the appeal for Christian unity and we've had the basis of Christian unity. Believers should keep the unity of the Spirit in peace.

Practical Application

Remember - unity is not uniformity!

In Ephesians 4 we are not urged to *be uniform* or to walk in lock-step - in uniformity! If we were, then everyone would have to be in the same denomination, and we'd all have to see eye to eye on everything! When we recognize and strive to keep the oneness of the body in order to keep the unity of the Spirit, we affirm the core essentials of the Christian faith, but we look beyond denominational and sectarian divisions. We realize that true believers differ in certain interpretations

of Scripture, for example. We don't demand that every Christian have the same taste in Christian music. We don't require every believer to use exactly the same translation of the Bible that we appreciate. We look beyond these things. Remember - unity is not uniformity!