

“Live in Unity”

July 14, 2024

Ephesians 4:1-6

I. Introduction

In the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, Paul taught about the spiritual blessings, honors, and privileges that Christians have. When a person makes Jesus Christ his Savior and Lord, he becomes a citizen of God’s kingdom, a member of God’s family and, as Paul wrote in **Ephesians 1:3**, receives “**every spiritual blessing in Christ.**” But along with the blessings and privileges, there are also responsibilities. As His children, the Lord expects each Christian to act like the new person he or she has become in Jesus Christ. Basically, He expects His standards to become our standards, His purposes our purposes, His desires our desires and so on. The first 3 chapters of Ephesians dealt with doctrine—our riches in Christ; the last 3 chapters explain our duty; that is, our responsibilities in Christ, i.e., how we should live.

The NIV translation kind of loses the transition from doctrine to application. A better translation for the 1st verse of chapter 4 would be: “**Therefore, I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live worthily of the calling with which you have been called**” (NET). God in His love and His grace has already blessed the Christian. He has given us a marvelous calling in Christ; now it is our responsibility to live up to that calling. Paul urged or pleaded with his reader to “**live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**” Every Christian is to live the Word of God by his actions or his walk as well as his words.

The oneness of believers in Christ—their unity—is already a spiritual reality. Now, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is up to Christians to live a life of unity on the earth before all men as a testimony to those around them and to bring glory to God. Paul began by listing six characteristics or essentials for faithful Christian living.

II. Characteristics or Essentials for Faithful Christian Living

A. Humility Paul began with *humility* or *lowliness*. Humility is the opposite of pride. Humility is the most fundamental Christian virtue. One cannot even begin to please God without humility. A person is

saved only when he recognizes that he is a sinner; that he is worthy of God's judgment; that he cannot save himself and then humbles himself and prays like the tax collector in [Luke 18:13](#), "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This is the beginning of humility.

Humility means knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, and being ourselves to the glory of God. [Turn to Romans 12:3](#). God doesn't want us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to—or less highly than we ought to. Humility means to see ourselves as we really are—as God sees us. When Simon Peter saw himself, he said in [Luke 5:8](#), "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" In complete humility, Christians put Christ first, others second, and self last. Or as [Philippians 2:3](#) says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."

B. Gentleness Humility leads to the 2nd characteristic of *gentleness or meekness*. Gentleness is part of the fruit of the Spirit found in [Galatians 5:23](#) and should characterize every child of God. Gentleness or meekness is power under control. A wild horse is tamed or "gentled" so that it can carry and obey a rider; its power is under the control of the rider. Biblical gentleness is power under the control of God.

[Numbers 12:3](#) calls Moses "a very humble man" but consider the power he demonstrated before Pharaoh and when leading the Israelites through the Wilderness. In [Matthew 11:29](#) Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus was gentle and humble, yet, using a whip, He drove the money changers from the temple ([John 2:12-16](#)). Writing about Jesus, [1 Peter 2:23](#) says that "when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

The gentle person is capable of righteous anger and action when God's Word or name is maligned or when others are harmed but not when something is done against himself. As can be seen in Jesus' life, such anger is controlled and carefully directed, and not a careless, wild emotion that splatters everyone who is near.

C. Patience Following gentleness is the 3rd characteristic, *patience* or *longsuffering*, i.e., the ability to endure annoyances and difficulties without retaliating or fighting back. The patient Christian endures negative circumstances and difficulties and never gives in to them. The patient Christian doesn't complain when his calling seems less glamorous than someone else's or when the Lord sends him to a place that is dangerous or difficult. He remembers that God the Son left His heavenly home of love, holiness, and glory to come to earth and was hated, rejected, spit upon, and crucified—without once returning evil for evil or complaining to the Father. Like Jesus, Christians are to be patient, or as other translations call it *long-tempered*.

D. Accepting each other in love The 4th characteristic is “bearing with one another in love” or putting up with each other in love, i.e., accepting each other in love. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” When one is controlled with the love of God—agape love—sacrificial love—like Christ, he will be able to continue to love even while others are abusing him. Such love even goes out to enemies and prays for its persecutors. Turn to Matthew 5:43-45. Sacrificial love is a choice and a responsibility for every Christian.

E. Working hard to keep unity The next characteristic is “making every effort to keep unity;” i.e., working hard to keep unity. Paul wrote that Christians are to be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit. Christians are to make every effort to keep the unity by which every true believer is bound to every other true believer. The verb used here means that one must continually be making every effort to maintain this unity—working hard 24/7 to keep unity. The spiritual unity of a home or a church is the responsibility of every person involved and the job never ends. However, spiritual unity is not, and cannot be created by the church. It is already created by the Holy Spirit. Christians must work hard to maintain this unity and not allow it to fail—we are all part of one body.

F. Peace Paul's final characteristic of Christian living is “peace” or “the bond of peace.” Isaiah 48:22 says, “There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.” As long as self is at the center; as long as one's

feelings, prestige and rights are the chief concern there will be no peace. **Colossians 3:15** says, “**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.**” When the peace of God rules in our hearts, when we are humble, gentle, patient, accepting each other in love, and working hard at keeping unity, then and only then there will be peace in that unity.

III. The Sources of Unity – After listing the characteristics of the Christian life, Paul then listed seven “one’s” or unities that unite all Christians—the Sources of Unity. He began with “one body.”

A. One Body There is only one body of believers, the church, which is composed of every saint who has trusted or will trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. There is no denominational or geographical body; no ethnic or racial body; there is no Gentile or Jewish body; no male or female body; no slave or freeman body. There is only Christ’s body and the unity within that body is what the Letter to the Ephesians is all about. It is here that a Christian exercises his spiritual gifts and helps others to grow (**Hebrews 10:25**). Then there’s ...

B. One Spirit The same Holy Spirit indwells each believer so that we belong to each other in the Lord. **Turn to 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.** Believers are individual temples of the Holy Spirit, that as **Ephesians 2:22** says, are “**being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.**” The 3rd source is ...

C. One Hope This hope refers to the return of the Lord to take His church to heaven. **Titus 2:13** says, “**We wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.**”

D. One Lord A 4th source of unity is *One Lord*. This is our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, lives for us, and one day will come for us. **Acts 4:12** says, “**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.**” It is difficult to understand how two believers can claim to have and obey the same Lord, and yet are not able to walk together in unity.

E. One Faith Then Paul wrote, “**One faith.**” This isn’t the act of faith by which a person is saved; it is the body of doctrine revealed in God’s Word. In true Christianity there is only one faith—**Jude 3** calls it “**the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.**” The early Christians recognized a body of basic doctrine that they learned, guarded, and taught to others. **2 Timothy 2:2** says, “**And the things you have heard me say**

in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” Lack of faithful and careful study of God’s Word, unexamined traditions, worldly influences, sinful inclinations, and many other things tend to break up or mutate this doctrine into many varying and contradictory forms—all of which lead to disunity. The 6th source of unity is *One Baptism*.

F. One Baptism This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs when one makes Jesus his Lord and Savior. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.”

G. Paul’s last source of unity is One God and Father The oneness of believers in the family of God is evident—for God “is over all, through all, and in all.” We are children in the same family, loving and serving the same Father. The “Lord’s Prayer” begins with “Our Father”—not “My Father.” Because of this, we ought to be able to walk together in unity. Just as in an earthly family, the various members have to give and take in order to keep a loving unity in the home, so God’s heavenly family must do the same.

IV. Conclusion

For three chapters Paul reminded Christians of God’s goodness and the marvelous salvation that is ours. Now with all the force possible, Paul urged--implored the readers—us—to live worthy of our calling. As well as having a concern for individual Christians and Christian living, Paul is concerned for Christian unity. If a person names and follows Christ as his Lord and Savior, we belong to that person and that person belongs to us. BUT there cannot be unity at *any* cost. Unity with all people is not the goal; unity in Christ is—the unity that comes from a shared faith and shared knowledge and lordship of Jesus Christ. There are limits to unity. Christians are not to break the unity of the Spirit by agreeing with false doctrine. Turn to 2 John 1:6-11. How do you know if a doctrine is false or not? You must study God’s Word; you must know what is in here. This then is our challenge: live a life demonstrating the characteristics of a Christian; study God’s Word so that you, like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, can see if what is said is really true or not. There is an old saying that goes like this: “*What you are doing speaks so loudly that I can’t hear what you are saying.*” What does your life say?

Communion Devotion – July 2024

Mark 14:16-26

Last Thursday was Independence Day—a day to celebrate our independence as a nation from the rule of Great Britain. It is a joyful time as we celebrate our many freedoms and all the things we have as Americans. If a person doesn't want to have all the freedoms and things we have here, he is free to renounce his American citizenship and move to a different country. There aren't too many that do that—not even the complainers, but there are millions who want to come here to have the freedoms we have.

This morning, we come together to celebrate a different Independence Day—a day to remember the Son of God who willingly gave His life so that we might be free from “the wages of sin”—an eternity in hell. Just as there is a choice to be an American citizen or not, people have a choice about whether or not they want to be part of the Kingdom of God with all of its freedoms and blessings. In Acts 16:31, Paul told the Philippian jailor, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 defines believing in Jesus as making Him “your Lord and your Savior.” If you have made this decision, if Jesus is your Lord and Savior, then whether or not you are a member of TBC, we invite you to join us in this celebration.

If one is an American citizen, there are some responsibilities, e.g., you must obey the laws of the land, you must respect the flag which represents this country and those who died for it and so on. Similarly, if you are a citizen of heaven, there are some responsibilities. These are what Paul listed in today's Scripture: humility, gentleness, patience, accepting each other in sacrificial love, working hard to keep unity, peace in unity. This morning as the elements are being passed take time to say “Thank You” to God for His love and sacrifice for you. But, also, take time to look at your heart and your mind and your life are you walking as God would have you walk? Are you walking “humbly with your God?” Make sure you are right with God and then come celebrate this Lord's Table with clean hands and a clean heart.