

# **The Unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-6)**

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## **Introduction**

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

These first verses of chapter four, first of all provide an environment that is crucial for the equipping of all saints that Paul will discuss below. "It is not so much a program that is needed but an environment (an atmosphere). What does this mean? An environment is the some total of the social, spiritual, and relational attitudes and factors in a group that influences what the individual thinks of him or herself and what he or she does." (R. Paul Stevens, *Liberating the Laity*, p.26).

Sin is a disruptive force, it always divides, separates, and splinters. It divides a man within and against himself. It has produced the constant fight and struggle which we are all aware of in our own lives and in the life of the church. Consequently, the central object of salvation, in a sense, is to re-unite, to bring together again, to reconcile, to restore the unity that God created before sin and the fall produced this terrible havoc between God and man, between men, and within man himself.

So the unity that we have in Christ is part of the grand design. Thus, one of the peculiar marks of the Christian calling is to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

## **The Character and Nature of Unity**

### **A Definition**

Unity is not a general spirit of friendliness or camaraderie. Nor is unity some common aim or series of aims.

### **Unity is a Product**

It is the result of all that Paul has been saying in chapters 1-3. It is the product of the cross and God's work in Christ. There can be no Christian unity unless it is based on the teaching of chapters 1-3. Since Christian unity is a result of God's work in Christ, it is not something that we are to aim at for the sake of unity.

### **Unity is "of the Spirit"**

Spirit is capitalized. It refers to the unity provided by the Holy Spirit. It is a unity which we can never produce. We are not even asked to do so. Because this is true, the following deductions are true:

### **Unity is Organic**

Unity is living and vital. It is not mechanical. It is not a coalition or an amalgamation. Such consist of a number of miscellaneous units coming together for a given purpose. But Christian unity, the unity of the Spirit, is a unity which starts within and works outward through organic life like we see in a flower or in the human body.

The unity of the church is organic in character. She is not a collection of parts. She is a new creation, a spiritual body created by God in Christ. The old has been done away in the this body. There are no longer the distinctions of man. There is no longer Jew and Gentile . . .

The analogy of the human body explains the nature of this unity.

(1) The human body is first, an organic unity. It consists of many parts: toes, fingers, hands, feet, legs, eyes, ears, etc. But it is not a collection of parts put together as in an automobile or as in a house. It begins from one cell which begins to develop and to grow and shoots off little buds that eventually make up the variegated parts. This is an organic and a living unity by creation. So is the church, spiritually speaking.

True, when a person believes in Christ, he is joined into union with Christ by Spirit baptism and becomes a member of the body, but by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, he is not merely and add on. He miraculously and spiritually becomes an organic part of the body of Christ.

### **Unity is Diversity**

There is diversity in unity, not a uniformity. The parts do not look alike, they do not function alike, yet, they are all important, needed, interdependent, and all work toward the same end, the purposes for which each member was designed in the function of the body as directed by the head and in accord with the creative purpose of God.

Some of the parts are covered, others are within the body and are unseen, but nevertheless, very important. Some gifts are more in the fore front, they are more obvious and others less so, but all are essential to the effective work of the body.

## **Practical Outworkings of Unity**

### **A Unity of Calling**

All believers are the called of God. Our calling is our responsibility to respond to what we have become in Christ. Every believer has been called to be Jesus' disciple and to serve in the body of Christ.

All are called of God. The "secret call" of the preacher or pastor does not make him or her more called than the carpenter . . .

Thematically, Ephesians 4 moves from one's calling to unity to one's calling to ministry (all are called to ministry = part of the one hope of your calling). Christ has given many gifts of grace for ministry (diversity) which come together in one common goal of maturity in Christ.

### **A Unity of Common Life and Source**

The unity of the Spirit is created through our union in Christ Jesus. The word "together" appears so frequently and in such innovative ways in this letter that it deserves special mention. The prefix, "with" or "together" is joined to a number of key words to express our joint life and the impossibility of life outside of this unity (cf. 2:5,6,19,21,22; 3:6; & 4:16). This stands against the spirit of individuality so common in our country today. You know, "do your own thing, go your own way."

### **A Unity of Ministry**

Our unity is a unity or oneness that exist not in spite of diversity, but because of it. It is the wonderful differences themselves which, when properly equipped, contribute to the function of the body and out of this function, attain an even deeper unity of maturity. Only as each part does its work can the body grow.

### **A Unity of Purpose**

The purpose is maturity in Christ, being conformed to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The ultimate goal is Christ-likeness, or spiritual maturity according to the standard of Christ. This is the primary

goal of the equipping and the unity desired. The more we possess His character and mind, the more we will experience the unity of the Spirit.

## Equipping--A Pastoral Task

The passage before us is not actually about equipping. The subject of the passage is unity. Equipping is not a thing to be valued in itself. It is simply an instrument of God's grand plan for his people, especially that they may be one, that they may function as the one body they have become in Christ.

Equipping is, in the final analysis, a pastoral task.

The verb form of the Greek word here, *katartizo*, is used in Luke 6:40 of training or instructing a disciple. There, as the context shows, it includes the idea of modeling, being an example. As the text says, "he will become like his teacher."

The noun form of the word, "equipping," *katartismos*, is used as a noun only once in the NT, here in Ephesians 4:12. But the word has an interesting medical history in classical Greek. To equip often meant to put a bone or a part of the human body into right relationship with the other parts of the body so that every part fits thoroughly. It means to realign a dislocated limb." (op cit, p. 25).

As the context of Ephesians 4 makes clear, the equipping there is much more than simply giving people skills for teaching, evangelism, or other ministries in the local church. It is primarily concerned with character formation, with Christ-likeness.

W.E. Vine points that the Greek verb for equipping, *katartizo*, "points out the path of progress." As the word was used of fitting out ships for a long journey, the whole process of equipping implies a journey toward a distant destination. Character is not developed quickly. It requires time and lots of it. This is our destination.

"Since the laity spends an enormous amount of time working inside or outside the home, their "church time" must be only a fraction of their life for God. Unless we equip the laity to live all of life for God, Christianity will degenerate into mere religion." (*Liberating the Laity*, p. 24). This is one of the subtle snares of the devil.

"Joints of supply." The word comes from *apto*, "to touch." It refers to "a point of contact," or to "a joint" which provides a point of contact between limbs and members of the body as well as a means of banding together and thus, unity. In the light of its medical usage in ancient times regarding joints and ligaments, Paul's usage in Col. 2:19 (note the one article), and its use here and in Col. 2:19 with the word "supply," seems to point to two ideas:

**(1) The point of contact and union:** This point of contact with members of the body of Christ provides the means of supply from the rest of the body as it receives directions from the brain, and blood and oxygen for its growth and health. There is also the element of the mutual sympathy and influence of the parts in contact. = the communication of life and energy.

**(2) The point of order and unity.** Order and unity are the conditions of growth on which the Apostle is insisting.

Every believer is a joint of supply, a point of contact and a source of supply through the head, Christ.

The root meaning of the word suggests "touch" or "contact." "Paul is saying that every member in his or her contact with other members supplies something the body needs" (p. 31, Paul Stephens, LL). Barth translates this verse: "He [Christ] provides sustenance to it through every contact" (Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 449). This would suggest that the local church should be structured to provide an environment rich in relationships of ministry with each person contributing to the body.

"Paul indicates that the body is constantly supplied (note the present participles) with energy and nourishment by the head, and is held together as a unity by that head alone (at Eph 4:16 the emphasis is on the vital cohesion and union of the parts with each other, here [in Col. 2:19] it focuses on the continuous dependence on the head).

"Supply" = as Robinson, "furnished," or "equipped," or as O'Brien, Word, "provided," or "supplied."

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