

8. What was Paul's request connected with God in his three-fold prayer?
9. Does God usually choose to work *for* us or *through* us?
10. Explain "to him be the glory."
11. Do you believe all this business is *really* possible in all generations—including this one?

Lesson Seven (4:1-10)

The Unity of the Body 4:1-6)

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

We have reached a major turning point in this epistle. Paul now leaves the grand theology of how God gives salvation, to take up the practical application of how man lives it. If a person chooses to be "in Christ" and a part of the covenant people, there are certain obligations which are laid upon him. All these duties are for his own good, and they in no way earn him the favor which God has given him. They are simply the lifestyle the Christian should expect to live.

V. 1 I therefore—In nearly all of Paul's epistles, he sooner or later comes to the "therefore" or "so what." He has spent three chapters describing God's work in salvation and is now ready to make some specific applications. It will deepen your understanding of each of the many obligations which follow to consider them in light of what God has done to make salvation possible and in light of the body of believers to which we belong.

a prisoner for the Lord—As in the beginning of chapter three, Paul's reference to his imprisonment adds strength to his appeal. He is not an idle bystander just offering advice. He is the soldier of the Lord, serving and suffering to carry out his mission.

beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called—Perhaps the word "beg" sounds too pathetic or helpless. The Greek word Paul used meant originally "to call to one's side" and is usually translated "exhort" or "change." (Note the parallel usage in Rom. 12:1.)

In an absolute sense, there is no way we can "walk worthily of the calling," as Paul puts it. No Christian ever lived a perfect life—even after being cleansed and reborn. However, this does not mean we should ever be content to set our sights on anything less. Total perfection may never be attained, but we will certainly come closer to it if we aim for it. Human nature will always cause us to fall a little short of our goal, whether that goal is high or low.

The "calling" of this verse and verse four refers to God's invitation to become a part of the chosen people "in Christ." God never forces a man to join his covenant people, but "calls" or "invites" him. Many are "called," but only those who accept the invitation are "chosen" (Matt. 22:1-4).

V. 2 with all lowliness and meekness—The very first step we must take to "walk worthily" is to humble ourselves. Likewise, the very first pre-requisite for the unity sought in verse 3 is humility. (See Phil. 2:1-3.) People can never live together in unity so long as each person thinks to highly of himself.

The Greek word for "lowliness" means literally "humble-mindedness." The word was always used in a bad light in the secular literature of Paul's time, because lowliness was not considered to be much of a virtue.

"Meekness" means "having strength under control." It must not be confused with weakness. The weak person yields because he is helpless and can do nothing else. The meek person yields, in spite of his own superior strength, because he seeks the well-being of the other man.

with patience—"Patience" is literally "having a long mind or temper." When people blow up over every petty annoyance, unity becomes impossible. The best way to lengthen the fuse on you temper is to remember how much God has to overlook and forgive in your own life! (See Eph. 4:32.)

forbearing one another in love—"Forbearing" means "putting up with." If the Father has made you a part of the same family I'm in, then I have to "put up with" you. Moreover, I must do more than merely tolerate you—I must forbear you "in love."

Notice the logical progression of these four steps toward "walking worthy" of the calling:

1. Be humble-minded.

2. Care more about the other fellow's well-being than your own.
3. Have a long fuse on your temper.
4. Love the other fellow so much that you can put up with his foolishness and stupidity, just as God puts up with yours.

V. 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit—The four steps just taken lead up to this final goal. God wants his people united. Notice that we do not create unity—we recognize and maintain a unity which God has already provided. Notice also that this unity is not a product of men, based on human endeavors, but the unity of the Spirit.

Most efforts toward church unity fail because the two above points are not recognized. Men try to establish their own basis for unity by negotiation and compromise, and they falsely assume that a merger of denominational headquarters will produce real unity. The unity of the Spirit is more than the union of the churches.

in the bond of peace—The mechanical union produced by human efforts brings friction instead of peace. That kind of “unity” is like that produced by a little boy who ties two cats’ tails together. The unity of the Spirit, on the other hand, is characterized by peace. “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

V. 4 There is one body—This is the first of seven things listed by Paul as the basis of our unity. Since there is only one of each of them, we who participate in each one must participate together. These seven “one’s” are the common denominator for Christians. They are the irreducible minimum upon which we must stand.

The one body is the body of Christ, the church. It is made up of all those whom God has accepted into his family. We cannot make anything a test of fellowship or requirement for admission which God has not himself established. Neither dare we ignore anything which God has required. No single denomination or movement is the entire body.

and one Spirit—The Holy Spirit spreads throughout and activates the entire body of believers. All God’s children have the same Holy Spirit within them (Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:9). Ever since the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he has been available to all men on the same basis (Acts 2:38-39). The Holy Spirit does not divide us, but makes us all members of one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—The third basis of unity is the one hope we all share in Christ. The essence of hope is that although we cannot see our final salvation and entrance

into eternal life, we still have a steadfast expectation of receiving it. Christians who share this one hope are drawn together because their lives are all oriented in the same direction. (See Rom. 8:24-25; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:13).

V. 5 one Lord—Christians have only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6). The Father has made Jesus our Lord (Acts 2:36) and one day every tongue will admit this fact (Phil. 2:11). No man can become a Christian without surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus (Rom. 12:3).

We would do well to remind ourselves of all the things the title “Lord” implies (see notes on 1:2), and of the folly of paying mere lip-service to our Lord (Luke 6:46; Matt. 7:21). The early Christians often were killed for taking Jesus as their only Lord, since they refused to call the Roman emperor their Lord.

one faith—Sometimes the word “faith” refers to the body of truth and doctrine revealed by God, as in Jude 3. However in all the uses of “faith” in Ephesians Paul has reference to “saving faith,” the personal trust and commitment to Jesus which is the basis of our salvation (see 2:8 and 3:17). While Christians may differ in their understanding of many things, they all share a common commitment to Christ.

God will forgive his children for many foolish notions if they just have one thing right—their relationship with the Son. And God will condemn men who have their systems of theology correct, but are not right with the Son.

one baptism—The early church had only one baptism and every member of the body had shared in it. There was not question about its form, immersion, because that was the clear meaning of the Greek word (*baptizo*). There was no question about its purpose, which included forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), bestowal of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13), and union with Christ (Rom. 6:1-5; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11-12).

It is sometimes alleged that this “one baptism” is a baptism in the Spirit rather than in water. It must be noted, however, that nowhere in the scriptures is anyone ever told to be baptized in the Spirit. (How could such a command be obeyed, anyway?) Furthermore, even after Cornelius and his household had received the miraculous giving of the Holy Spirit, Peter *commanded* them to be baptized in water! (Acts 10:44-48).

In the early church Christian baptism was a primary source of unity. All Christians had participated in a common initiatory rite as they entered the body. They had in common the baptismal experience, in which the water and the Spirit are both involved. There was one

baptism—only one—and it drew together the family of God.

V. 6 one God and Father of us all—The ultimate unity of the entire universe is based upon the Fatherhood of God. He, through the Son, is the source of all things and the origin of all existence.

When men recognize and honor the true God they are brought into unity with him and with all creation. For Christians, God is not only the Father from which they came, but also the Father to whom they were returning for eternity.

who is above all and through all and in all—God reigns supreme over all creation. He permeates every particle of existence. He does not, however, live in all created things as though that were his body. God existed, unchanged, before the worlds were made and shall remain unchanged after the elements have melted with a fervent heat (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

By his grace he did choose to reveal himself in human flesh through his son Jesus, and he does now choose to dwell in Christians as his temple (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Diversity Within Unity (4:7-10)

7 But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it is said:

"When he ascended on high and he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

V. 7 But grace was given to each of us—Within our unity in Christ there is diversity. While we all stand united on the seven basics just listed, we each take our own individual positions of service. These individual roles which each member of the body carries out do not destroy the body's unity, but indeed enhance it.

The "grace" that is given to each of us is a job responsibility, just as it was for Paul (Eph. 3:2,7). God has been gracious and kind to allow us to serve in his kingdom.

This passage does not say that each man has one gift—only one—carefully hidden by God. It does not suggest that we should undertake a search and discovery operation. The emphasis is on the simple fact that we do not all serve God in the same way—we serve him in whatever ways we can.

according to the measure of Christ's gift—Whatever abilities and opportunities we may have should be considered the gift of Christ. Since they are gifts, we have no right to feel proud for the specific ones

we may possess. Likewise, we must not scorn a brother to whom Christ has given a task we would not esteem very highly.

This same lesson is taught by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:4-31 with reference to the dispensing of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the early church. The gifts were different, but the principle is the same. We should give thanks for every member of the body and the function it is able to do. All the functions of every member are necessary to the completeness of the body.

V. 8 Therefore it is said—As is often the case, Paul appeals to scripture to prove his point. This time he quotes Psalm 68:18. Following the scripture quotation, he uses verses nine and ten to demonstrate why this verses should be taken in reference to Christ. He uses an approach which would have been quite clear to the first century mind, but may seem strange to us today. Even so, if you follow the line of argument carefully you can appreciate the point he makes. Notice that the first line of the quotation is necessary to prove the connection with Jesus Christ, while the second line carries the message Paul wanted: "He gave gifts to men."

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives—In the context of Psalm 68 the conquering God is seen going up to Mount Zion in victory. From Sinai to the promised land God had made his people victorious over their enemies.

These words have an even greater fulfillment, however, in Jesus Christ. When he ascended into the heavenly Zion, the new Jerusalem, he had conquered the forces of Satan. The principalities and powers were disarmed and defeated by Jesus, who led them as his captives in his triumphal victory parade (Col. 2:15).

and he gave gifts to men"—When these words are compared with Psalm 68:18, you will notice a difference. There it says he *received* gifts among men. Two factors help us in solving this apparent problem. First, certain ancient versions (the Peshitta and one of the Targums) do state this verse as Paul quotes it. Second, Psalm 68 in any version is also a Psalm of God giving to man in many ways. (See verses 5, 6, 10, 11, 19, and 35.) As the last verse of Psalm 68 makes clear, the reason God received gifts from men was to "give power and strength to his people." Understood in this light, the verse Paul quotes is certainly not being taken out of its proper context.

When Christ ascended to his throne and "gave gifts to men" those gifts were the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, with their spiritual endowments for leading the church (verse 12).

V. 9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended—Paul uses a

typical first century line of argument here. He who ascends must first have descended. What goes up must first have come down. And obviously, he who came down and then ascended is Jesus Christ. This proves that it is justifiable to apply the Psalm to Christ and his church.

(If an inspired apostle says there was a hidden meaning in a Psalm, I will accept it on his authority. If an uninspired interpreter tries to make a clever parallel, I will not be impressed.)

into the lower parts of the earth?—The “lower parts of the earth” is probably another way of saying that Jesus went down into death or Hades. (See Phil. 2:8; Rom. 10:6; Acts 2:27.) It is possible, however, that the “lower parts” simply refers to earth itself, which is “lower” than the heavenly home from which Jesus came.

V. 10 He who descended is he who also ascended—Jesus Christ, who became obedient even unto death, was highly exalted by the Father (Phil. 2:9). God raised Jesus from the dead and lifted him up to his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20).

far above all the heavens—The imagery of these words is much the same as Eph. 1:21 “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.” Jesus, with the Father, is at the top.

that he might fill all things—As in Eph. 1:23, Jesus is the one who “fills all in all.” From his position of superiority over all the universe, Jesus sustains (Heb. 1:3) and holds together all things (Col. 1:17).

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of “therefore” in verse one?
2. Is it possible to lead a life that is really “worthy” of our calling?
3. How would you contrast the view of the world toward “lowliness” or humble-mindedness with the view of Christians?
4. How is it possible to be patient and forbearing with people who are stupid and foolish?
5. What are the seven basic “one’s” named in verses four through six? Can you recite them from memory?

6. If there is only one body, why are there so many denominations?
7. What is the one baptism which all Christians shared in the first century?
8. God wants unity. We all want unity. We could have unity if everybody would come and join me. (What is wrong with this approach?)
9. What is shown about the character of Christ, when in his victory over the hosts of Satan he “gave gifts to men”?
10. How was Paul justified in applying Psalm 68:18 to Christ? Can you express the line of argument from verses nine and ten in your own words?

Lesson Eight (4:11-16)

So We May All Grow Up 4:11-16

11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

The master plan for the church is given in these verses. Not only are the job descriptions laid out for us, but the reason behind the jobs is also given. The ultimate purpose of the body is to grow up into the head. The ultimate purpose of a man’s salvation is to come to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.