

MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

4 So then, I, the prisoner for the Lord, exhort you to walk [in a way that is] worthy of the calling for which you were called: ²[walk] with all humility and meekness, and with patience, bearing with each other in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. ⁴[There is] one body and one Spirit—just as the calling to which you were called has one hope—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:1-6)

Introduction

If you were to come upon a church with the name, Battlefield Bible Church, what thoughts might pass through your mind about that congregation? In Maryland, in the area where some of the famous battles of the Civil War took place, there is a little red brick church with that very name: Battlefield Bible Church.

One summer day, a Christian couple who were sightseeing in that part of the country, drove by that little church. The name of the church, printed in large white letters, caught their eye and peaked their curiosity. The couple pulled off to the side of the road, turned around, and drove into the parking lot of that little church. They sought out the pastor's study and politely inquired as to why the church chose the name, Battlefield Bible Church.

The pastor explained to them that the congregation had chosen this particular name for three reasons: First, the name accurately identified their location. Second, the name reminded them of the fact that as Christians we are engaged in a spiritual warfare. Third, the name was a constant caution to them that they must never allow their church to become a "civil war" battlefield (*Our Daily Bread*, 5/16/93.)

In Ephesians 4:1-6 we are exhorted to live a life that is in harmony with our divine calling to be members of the household of God.

As members of the household of God, we must be diligent to fulfill our obligation to *"maintain the unity of the [Holy] Spirit."*

I. Let Us Maintain the Unity of the Spirit, ...by Appreciating the Sacred Oneness of God and His Church (4:4-6)

The Apostle Paul informs the Ephesian Christians, and us, that there is *"one body and one Spirit."* Although there are many individual congregations and numerous denominations, we must never lose sight of the fact that there is one spiritual body composed of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul writes to the Galatians, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free man; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28.) Paul also had occasion to remind the Corinthian Christians of the oneness of Christ's body, the church,

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,² to the church of God that is in Corinth—to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints [together] with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (he is both their Lord and ours.) ...⁹God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:1-2,9)

It is the one and the same Holy Spirit who has brought each believer into the body of Christ and who personally dwells in each member of Christ's body: *"by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether we were Jews or Greeks, whether we were slaves or freemen—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink"* (1 Cor. 12:13.)

Paul goes on to write, *"the calling to which you were called has one hope."* Everyone whom the Holy Spirit has brought to Christ has come to possess the same sure and blessed hope. It is the sure hope of receiving the promised divine inheritance, as Paul prays, *"that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance for the saints"* (Eph. 1:18.) It is the sure hope of being God's treasured possession. Paul informs us that the Holy Spirit *"is a 'deposit' guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of [God's] possession, to the praise of his glory"* (Eph. 1:14.) The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the guarantee, the down payment, insuring that God will finally come to receive us unto Himself as His cherished possession. Furthermore, every Christian possesses the sure hope of being a part of God's living sanctuary; we are being *"built together [with the saints] to become the place where God dwells by the Spirit"* (Eph. 2:22.) As these passages indicate, much of our hope is already in the process of being at least partially realized in this present world, but will only fully being realized in the immediate presence of God.

Furthermore, we are informed and reminded of the fact that there is *"one Lord."* Every true Christian acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the one and only Head of the church, confessing together with the Apostle Paul, *"Christ is the head of the church, he being the savior of the body"* (Eph. 5:23.) Every Christian acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives, recognizing that Jesus invitation to receive Him as our Savior is also a call to submit to His lordship: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (Matt. 11:28-29.) Jesus calls us to become His disciples, taking His yoke upon us and submitting to His divine lordship.

We also are informed that there is *"one faith."* Every true Christian acknowledges the Bible as his divine authority for faith and conduct, accepting Paul's teaching as he instructs Timothy, *"All scripture, [being] inspired by God, is indeed profitable for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (2 Tim. 3:16.) Paul further instructs Timothy, *"What you have heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 1:13.) Timothy is

instructed to preserve the divine truth and not to deviate from it. Paul warns the Corinthians, *“Do not go beyond what has been written”* (1 Cor. 4:6.)

There is *“one baptism.”* The New Testament recognizes one baptism—that baptism signifying the spiritual reality of the Christian’s identification with the Triune God and his fellowship with Him, as the Lord Jesus teaches at the time just prior to His ascension into heaven: *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matt. 28:19.)

There is *“one God and Father of all.”* Every Christian acknowledges the truth expressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, *“Even if there are so-called gods—whether in heaven or on earth—just as indeed there are many such gods and many such lords; nevertheless, for us [who have knowledge there is] one God—the Father—from whom all things come and for whom we live, and one Lord—Jesus Christ—by whom all things exist and by whom we live.”* As Christians, we collectively know and confess the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the only true God and as our God and Father, in accord with our Lord’s own testimony. Following His resurrection, Jesus declared to Mary, *“Go to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God”* (Jn. 20:17.)

Let us maintain the unity of the Spirit, by appreciating the sacred oneness of God and His church. To be identified as a true brother or sister in Christ, one must adhere to the standard of accepting the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God and acknowledging Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, indeed, the only Savior and Lord. All who meet this criterion are to be accepted as true brothers and sisters in Christ.

II. Let Us Maintain the Unity of the Spirit, ...by Exhibiting the Attitudes that Promote Peace (4:1-3)

We are exhorted to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit. We must recognize that there is a sacred spiritual unity, created by the Holy Spirit, a unity of Christians with the Lord Jesus Christ and with each other as members of His body, note 1 John 1:3, *“We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”* The Apostle John invites us to enter into the fellowship of the apostles, and their fellowship is with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It is our obligation to do all that we can to preserve this unity and to insure that it is not disrupted, note the apostle’s admonition concerning the preserving of this sacred unity:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and

slander, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God by Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:30-32)

We maintain the unity of the Spirit by means of “*the bond of peace.*” Peace is viewed as a belt or band that holds the body of Christ together in unity:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Rom. 12:18)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Rom. 14:19)

Finally, brothers, farewell. Be perfected, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. (2 Cor. 13:11)

When sincere Christians differ and conflict threatens to result, they should consider the following guidelines in an effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit. First, they should each ask themselves such questions as these: Is there a biblical principle at stake in this controversy? Is a biblical command clearly being violated or a biblical truth clearly being sacrificed? Or, am I only insisting on my own way in this controversy or seeking to impose my own personal scruples?

Second, they should humbly look to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and grace. They should seek the grace to yield to their brother when a biblical principle is not clearly at stake, as opposed to insisting on having their own way. On the other hand, they should seek the grace to speak the truth in love when a biblical principle is at issue, following the counsel of the Apostle Paul given to Timothy:

... the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, with the hope that God would grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth. (2 Tim. 2:24-25)

Third, they should be confident that it is Christ's church, and so ask Him to graciously exercise His lordship and humbly offer themselves in His service—praying in accordance with Paul's admonition recorded in Philippians 3:15-16, “*All of us who are mature should have this attitude [i.e.; the attitude of pressing on towards the goal of our Christian calling], and if you have any different attitude, God will certainly reveal that to you; ¹⁶only let us walk in line with what we have attained.*” We may pray for the Lord to graciously convict and convince our brothers if they are clearly acting or speaking contrary to the Word of God, being sure to examine our own lives and yield ourselves to the Lord.

Fourth, they should be careful to avoid a self-righteous and condemning spirit, avoiding the example set by Elijah as recorded in 1 Kings 19:14,18, when he

exhibited an attitude of self-pity and self-righteousness, viewing himself alone as being faithful to the LORD:

And [Elijah] replied, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left; and now they are trying to kill me, too. [In verse 18 we find the LORD's response to Elijah:] "Yet I will reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." (1 Kg. 19:14,18)

What attitudes are most conducive to maintaining the unity of the Spirit One such attitude is that of *"humility and meekness."* As Christians, we are to possess and to practice the character of Christ our Savior, note Matthew 11:29, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* Christian *"humility"* means assuming the role and the mind of a servant, instead of selfishly demanding our own rights and insisting on having our own way. Christian *"meekness"* means the willingness to endure injury without resorting to retaliation or harboring resentment, submitting the matter to God, in imitation of our Lord. Referring to the Lord Jesus, Peter writes, *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself [the Greek pronoun may also contain the meaning, "his cause"] to him who judges justly"* (1 Pet. 2:23.) If necessary, the offended brother may bring the matter to the attention of the church body, following the instructions given by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17,

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matt. 18:15-17)

Another attitude that promotes peace is *"patience."* This, too, is the character exhibited by our Lord Jesus Christ. Consider the testimony of the Apostle Paul concerning the patience of the Lord Jesus Christ exhibited toward him: *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶But for this very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would believe on him"* (1 Tim. 1:15b-16a.) Patience involves the exercise of understanding and restraint, as opposed to being quick-tempered, impulsive and unsympathetic, as the Apostle James exhorts us: *"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry; ²⁰for man's wrath does not bring about the righteousness of God"* (Jas. 1:19-20.)

Yet another attitude that promotes peace is that of *“bearing with each other in love”* (the Greek verb literally means, “to endure, to put up with, to tolerate.”) A stimulus to exhibiting such an attitude is to ever bear in mind the fact that God’s Holy Spirit is dwelling in that fellow Christian with whom we may be at odds, and that God has not yet finished His work of grace in that brother—just as God has not yet completed His work of grace in our own lives. This bearing with one another is to be done *“in love”*—as opposed to a spirit of cold stoicism or superficial courtesy or self-pitying martyrdom—it is to be carried out in a spirit of self-giving, other-oriented, Christ-like love.

Let us maintain the unity of the Spirit, by exhibiting the attitudes that promote peace. Because our Lord Jesus Christ possesses and exhibits all the attributes we need, we can look to Him to see how we should act, considering His conduct as it is recorded in the Scriptures, and we can look to Him to supply us with the grace to act like Him.

Conclusion

Ephesians 4:1-6 informs us that it is our Christian duty to live a life that is in harmony with our divine calling as members of the household of God; it is our Christian obligation to *“maintain the unity of the Spirit.”* By the grace of Christ, let us diligently seek to do so in our homes, within our congregation, and wherever we encounter fellow believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.