

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:1-3 ... “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 has always been a lot of talk among Christians on the subject of unity. Sometimes it is expressed as unity among churches, and others speak of unity within the faith. Some question why we all cannot get along better. Some suggest there should be more unity between Protestants and Catholics, while others even suggest that Christians should be unified even with unbelievers. In today's letter from Paul, he encourages us to “keep the unity of the Spirit.” What does that mean?

Paul starts by stating he is in prison for preaching about Christ. It may be a government jail, but Paul is there according to God's plan. Had he not been there, we might never have received the letter of Ephesians, so you should be thankful that Paul was imprisoned. When Paul writes: “worthy of the calling with which you were called,” he is speaking of the Lord's instructions for us to live righteous lives and to share Christ with others. That is our calling and walking in that calling is the act of doing what he instructs us to do.

When Paul urges us to serve God in “lowliness and gentleness,” he is referring to humility and meekness. Humility is what keeps us from assuming a superior role in the body of Christ, and in witnessing to others. Meekness is when you extend God's grace for you, to others. We exhibit “longsuffering” through our patience with others and self-control when unbelievers challenge our faith or provoke us.

“Bearing with one another in love” refers to our tolerance of people who are still maturing in their faith. Though they might have a long way to go in their spiritual development, we love them anyway; we encourage and correct them in love. “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit,” is where some believers misunderstand this passage. Paul is not referring to unity among believers, such as you and I agreeing on everything. Instead, he is speaking to the gift of unity in His Holy Spirit that we receive when we are born again. You and I – if you are a born-again believer – have the same spirit of God living within us. That is what unifies us, not our attitudes, beliefs, ideas, race or culture.

The last phrase in today's passage is important: “in the bond of peace.” This is not peace from terrorism, natural disasters, or accidents. It is your peace with God. If I do not have peace with God, I will not have peace with you. I cannot give you what I do not have. The unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace are only possible between born-again followers of Christ. And even then, unity does not mean that we must combine all of the different denominations into a single church, that we must agree on a particular form of worship, or that we all worship on the same day of the week. Unity simply means that we share the same relationship with God, through his Holy Spirit.

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