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The Unity of the Spirit

“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 is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Ephesians 4:1-6

We have mentioned that the first three chapters of Ephesians are doctrinal or theory or philosophical foundations for the faith. In the beginning of chapter four we continue with some of this foundation before we get to some of the practical applications, or how our standing in Christ should be lived out in our daily lives. However, the first part of chapter four is also along the line of the doctrinal theory as Paul speaks about the unity of the Spirit and the oneness of the gospel message. He will begin some of the practical application later in chapter four when he talks about the purpose of the gifts given to the church that results in our edification and putting off the old man and putting on the new man. But in the first six verses of chapter four Paul continues to lay the foundation of our faith as he speaks of the oneness of God and the unity of the Spirit.



Doctrine First

Paul lays the doctrinal foundation first before he applies the doctrine to moral principles and the behavior that should follow. Burton Coffman in his commentary refers to John Wesley’s commentary on the New Testament and states:

It should be noted that Paul placed doctrine first. All human morality derives from the authority of God; and, apart from mortal responsibility to the Creator, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as right or wrong conduct, immorality or morality! This underlies the total helplessness of men, apart from God, to direct their own affairs. The ultimate authority for evaluating the deeds of people as either praiseworthy or blameworthy cannot lie within men but must be grounded externally in the will of the Father in heaven. It was therefore by design that Paul first wrote of Christian doctrine, then of Christian morals. "This is the true order."

The Christian Walk

Walking is a term frequently used in the Bible to describe the kind of life God’s people are called to follow. Note these examples:

Gal. 5:16, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”

Psa. 1:1, "Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful..."

Rom. 8:1, "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

Eph. 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

2 Jn. 1:6, "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."

There is a designated lifestyle to which we are called in Christ.

We could go on citing other references to our "walk" in the Scripture, but these will be sufficient. It is clear that our calling in Christ signifies that we will be different from the world. There is a designated lifestyle to which we are called in Christ.

The Christian Character

Paul points to certain traits of Christian character that enables us to walk worthy of our calling: Lowliness, Meekness, Longsuffering, and Forbearing

Lowliness of mind - Barclay tells us that "In Greek there is no word for humility which has not some suggestion of meanness attached to it." Humility is a becoming virtue in Christians because it reflects their evaluation, of themselves in respect of the infinitely righteous and holy God. It is the fountain from which are derived all of the Christian virtues. Conceit on the part of a child of God is a denial of the faith. There is also a very proper and necessary self-esteem which enters into Christian character (Romans 12:3). (Coffman)

Meekness - Martin chose "gentleness" as a synonym for this word; "It is closely connected with the spirit of submissiveness." Moses was described as "meek" (Numbers 12:3); and perhaps in the

character of the mighty lawgiver can be seen the true qualities which are indicated by this word. Certainly, "weakness" is not one of them. It does not mean docile, easy to handle or merely "cooperative." It refers to moral authority and power issuing in restraint as far as human temptations are concerned. (Coffman)

Longsuffering - "This word is used of God's patience with men" (Romans 2:4; 9:22; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 3:15). "If God had been a man, he would long since have wiped out the world for all its disobedience!" Paul's use of the word here in the sense of a Christian virtue suggests that Christians should be tolerant, forgiving, and understanding of one another's mistakes and sins. A Christian who is always "up tight" about the mistakes of others can create a disaster in any congregation. He, in fact, is a disaster! (Coffman)

Forbearance - In a word, this means that a Christian should accept his place with other Christians, having an attitude that grants to them the same "right to belong" which he claims for himself. (Coffman)

Giving Diligence to Keep Unity

Paul makes a reference here to the unity of the Spirit. There may be all kinds of "unity" movements, but they may not all reflect the unity of the Spirit. The unity of the Spirit can only be achieved as we submit to the word of God. Since we know that the Spirit is the inspiration behind all Scripture, "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," we can be certain that the unity desired can only be derived from the inspired Word.

There may be all kinds of "unity" movements, but they may not all reflect the unity of the Spirit.

We are instructed to give diligence to this task. What does that mean? Word Study: Cognate: 4704 *spoudázō* – properly, be swift (go fast, be *speedy*); (figuratively) to move speedily by showing *full diligence* (fully applying oneself); acting *fervently* (*speedy* commitment) to accom-

plish all that God assigns through faith ("His in-birthed *persuasion*").

As Paul states at the end of his life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8-9).

While we may not always achieve our goals, the direction of our lives and our striving is always in the direction of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Ones of Ephesians 4

There are seven "ones" that are listed in Eph. 4:4-6. This is a part of the unity of the Spirit that we need to keep.

1. One Body – as we have noted in this study several times, the body, the church, the kingdom, the family of God, the dwelling place or building of God all refer to the same group of individuals. They are the redeemed in Christ, the saved. Eph. 1:22-23, "And God put everything under His feet and made Him head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Eph. 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior."

2. One Spirit – the Spirit is the third person of the Godhead as it is revealed in Scripture. The three are present at the baptism of Jesus – "As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. Suddenly the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!'" (Matt. 3:16-17).

As Paul describes the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit for the good of the body, the church, we again see all three involved: "There are different gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different ministries, but the same Lord. There are different ways of working, but the same God works all things in all people" (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Peter promised the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that accompanies Christian baptism, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in

the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

3. One Hope – Paul makes this declaration in his defense before Felix: "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust" (Acts 24:15). In explaining how death reigned through Adam and life reigns through Christ, Paul said: "... so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21).

Paul makes this inspired declaration in 2 Cor. 4:16 – 5:1, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There can be no doubt that the Scriptures teach that our hope is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

4. One Lord – in writing to the Corinthians about food offered to idols, Paul affirms: "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*" (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

Peter makes this confession when many were turning away from Jesus: "Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?' But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Jn. 6:67-69).

Peter makes this confession in Caesarea Philippi, "Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the

Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16-17).

5. One Faith – The writer of Hebrews begins chapter 11 with a definition of faith and proceeds to give examples of how faith worked in the lives of various men of faith. Heb. 11:1-3, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”

Jude urges us to contend for the faith: “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Jude’s reference to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” must refer to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is God’s power unto salvation to all who believe.

6. One Baptism – There are seven baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. At the time of the writing of Ephesians (60 to 61 AD) Paul says there is only one baptism. In Heb. 6:1-2 the Hebrew writer refers to ‘baptisms’ as one of the fundamental teachings that we must progress beyond as we go on to perfection.

The one baptism is the one Jesus commissioned the apostles to teach in all the world.

Coffman has this comment on Heb. 6:1-2: “The use of the plural ‘baptisms’ doubtless sprang from the fact that no less than seven baptisms are mentioned in the New Testament, these being: (1) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11); (2) the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11); (3) the baptism of John (Matthew 3:16); (4) the baptism unto Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2); (5) the baptism of suffering (Luke 15:30); (6) the baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29); and (7) the baptism of the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The seventh of these is beyond question the ‘one’ baptism

of Ephesians 4:5; and the knowledge of these things was most certainly part of the elementary things that one had to know in order to become a Christian.”

The one baptism is the one Jesus commissioned the apostles to teach in all the world. It is immersion in water for the remission of sins that we might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38) Acts 2:47 further teaches of those who were being baptized: “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

7. One God – The Scripture consistently presents God in three persons, even from the very beginning we see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Gen. 1:1-2, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Hebrew word used here is the plural form of God, “Elohim.”

The New Testament teaches that Jesus was with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the beginning of creation. In John 1:1-5, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

In his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens, the Apostle Paul taught this truth about the one God: Acts 17:22-31:

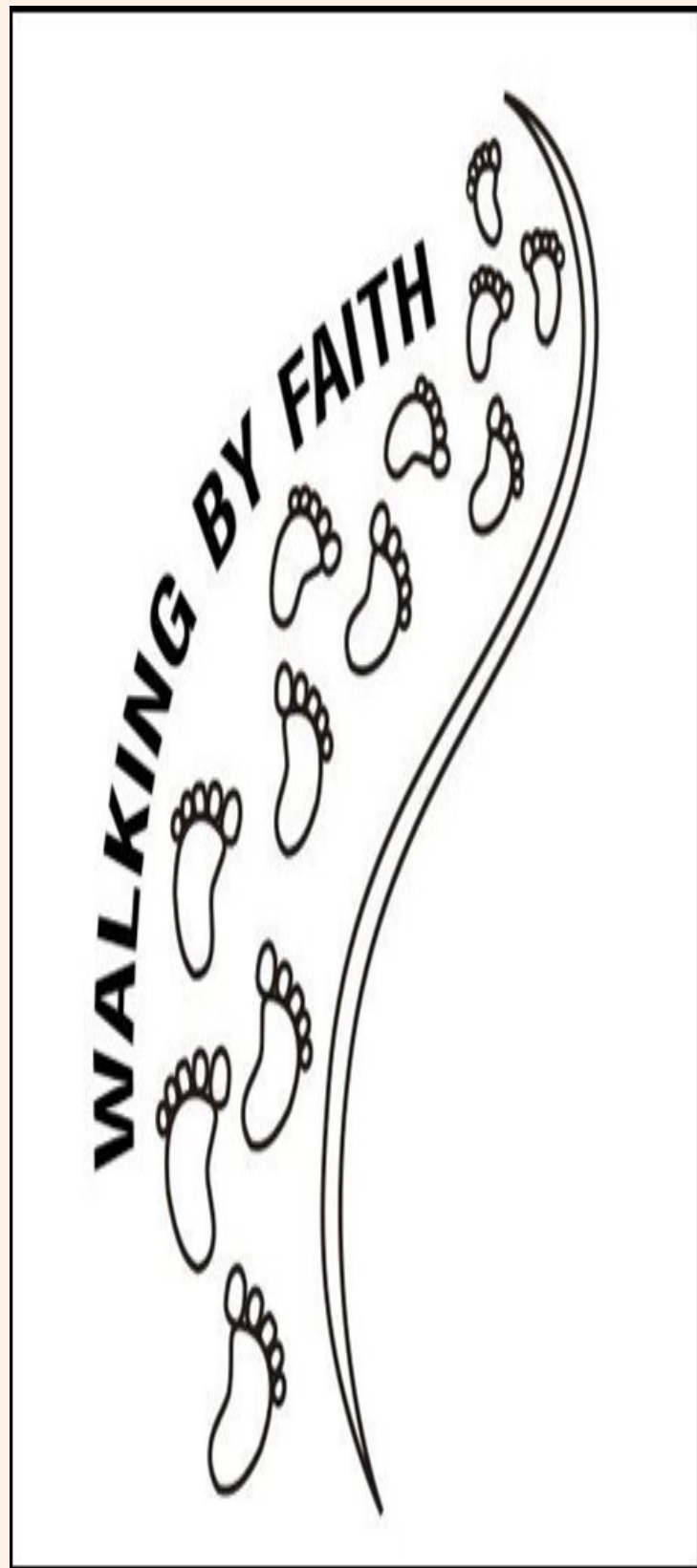
Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the

boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

These seven ones are a part of the unity of the Spirit that we are urged to endeavor to keep. Paul affirms that God the Father is "above all, and through all, and in you all." The doctrinal foundation of the nature of God and the nature of his kingdom, is the great bedrock on which the church of Jesus Christ is built. As disciples of Christ, we understand that this doctrine leads us to be a certain kind of people, and it affects our moral behavior. We are holy, that is, separate from the world, because He is Holy (1 Pet. 1:15). As Paul affirms: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Tit. 2:11-14).

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Sources: Burton Coffman Commentary



An Active Faith

“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” 1 THESSALONIANS 3:6-10 (ESV)

When writing to the young church at Thessalonica, the apostle Paul was delighted to hear of their active faith from Timothy. Paul was very concerned for the faith of these new Christians. Due to disruptions and riots, Paul could not stay and minister to this new congregation as he intended to do (ref. Acts 17; 18). As any concerned father, we can imagine his joy and thankfulness to hear that they were doing well in the Lord and growing in faithfulness.

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Often, many struggle with how to grow and develop faith in the Lord. Looking at the example of the church at Thessalonica offers a few keys to a growing faith.

It's not known what all this church may have known or how much Paul could have shared as he taught them before his hasty departure. However, what can be seen is their active faith. Earlier in the letter, Paul recorded:

“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.”

1 THESSALONIANS 1:6-8 (ESV)

What is it that they were doing? They were actively practicing the godly examples they had witnessed in the life of Paul and others. They were actively practicing what they did know. In doing so, their faith in the Lord had become an example to others.

Growing faith will not be idle. Faith that grows and develops will be active.

It may be a struggle to develop and deepen our faith in the Lord. There may be struggles and challenges to overcome. How is faith developed? Actively practice what you know. At first, our knowledge of the Lord may be limited. We may not fully understand everything revealed to us in the Scriptures concerning the Lord. What can we learn from the church at Thessalonica? They actively practiced what they knew and saw in others. In having an active faith, they were serving as an example to others.

Growing faith will not be idle. Faith that grows and develops will be active. Faith can be developed by activating what we know. In doing so, faithfulness can serve as an example to others.

Blessings!

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“Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in. He attaches far more importance to godly intercourse than we do. Since union is strength, he does his best to promote separation.”

- Charles Spurgeon



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