

Biblical Unity  
Ephesians 4:1-6

August 24, 2008

A. Introduction

1. the two sections of the book of Ephesians are:
2. the first section begins with the subject:<sup>A</sup>
3. what do people you know think of the church?

B. Prerequisites for Biblical Unity

4:1

1. how is the importance of this teaching shown?
2. the first prerequisite:<sup>B</sup>
3. the second prerequisite:

C. The Personality of Biblical Unity

1. it takes its personality from:<sup>C</sup>
2. we are to walk with ...<sup>D</sup>
3. also with ...<sup>E</sup>

4:2a

4:2b

4. and with ...

4.2c

5. this personality is demonstrated by

a. our ...<sup>F</sup>

4:2d

b. our ...<sup>G</sup>

4:3

D. The Platform under Biblical Unity

4:4-6

1. the seven planks of the platform are seven ...
2. One Body
3. One Spirit
4. One Hope
5. One Lord
6. One Faith
7. One Baptism
8. One God and Father

E. Conclusion: applied to me this means ...

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<sup>A</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>B</sup> Matthew 11:28, John 7:37-39

<sup>C</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4, John 17:21-23

<sup>D</sup> Proverbs 27:2, Philipians 2:3-8

<sup>E</sup> Matthew 11:28-29

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<sup>F</sup> Galatians 6:2

<sup>G</sup> Titus 3:5

A. Introduction

1. the messages this year have formed a series on the church: studies in Paul's letter to the Ephesian church
  - a. today we come to a watershed in that book
    - (A) the division between its two sections
      - (1) the doctrinal: teaching about our faith; and,
      - (2) the practical: teaching about our lives
    - (B) the first verse of this second section, 4:1, begins, literally, 'Therefore<sup>-{2}</sup>, I beseech you, I the prisoner in the Lord, ...' or '... for the Lord, ...'
      - (1) that word, 'therefore,' joins the truth of the first half of this book of Ephesians with the second half
      - (2) the first half provides the basis for the second half
    - (C) most outlines of this book make this fact evident; e.g.,
      - (1) The Church: Saints Residing in Christ ... Chs. 1-3
      - (2) The Church: Saints Residing on Earth ... Chs. 4-6
    - (D) so we can see that the first three chapters deal with the spiritual blessing and privileges in Christ that belong to the saints comprising God's people, the church, while the last three chapters, with how the saints should respond to those blessing and privileges in Christ
  - b. the first subject that Paul deals with in this second section
    - (A) is that of church unity ... of Biblical church unity
    - (B) first of all let us note, that there is, in the words of the English philosopher, Francis Bacon, a wide interval between unity and uniformity; this is readily apparent in a verse that forms a commentary on today's text: "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)
    - (C) Biblical unity is a to be unity in diversity; God's goal for the church is that it contain those of every tribe and nation, to the glory of God, yet be one people

2. when we look at the church, though, what do we see?
  - a. Christians do not seem to be very united
    - (A) the young, those from other cultures, and even the mature from our own culture
    - (B) see a confusing array of denominations
    - (C) so they avoid 'organized religion,' and instead look for spiritual fulfilment in all the wrong places
  - b. as Baptists, we know this disunity all too well
    - (A) Baptists seem to be known for fights and church splits
    - (B) I read of a town where there was a Baptist church at all four corners of one intersection – none of them talking to each other!
    - (C) 'Two-in-the-Seed Predestinarian Baptist' denomination has only 2 churches!
  - c. ecumenicism, a word meaning 'world-wide' or 'universal'
    - (A) seeks to fold all Christian communions into one group
    - (B) numbers matter, its advocates argue; if we get large enough we will be able to influence society for good
    - (C) but the union they seek seems to be of the lowest common denominator variety: any are accepted if they believe in some fashion that Jesus is Lord
    - (D) so we had here in Canada an union of three groups: one being very solid in doctrine; a second, filled with evangelistic fervour; the third, every individual serving; and all these strengths seemed lost in the result
  - d. so, then, how do we achieve a Biblical unity ...
    - (A) ... a unity that will witness to the world around us?
    - (B) ... a unity that will remain true to Scripture?
    - (C) ... a unity that will give glory to our God
  - e. let us look at
    - (A) the Prerequisite for Biblical Unity
    - (B) the Personality of Biblical Unity
    - (C) the Platform under Biblical Unity

B. Prerequisites for Biblical Unity . . . . . 4:1

1. *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called*

- a. Paul uses two ways to show how important is this teaching
  - (A) he mentions his own situation
  - (B) he uses a strong entreaty so they will pay attention
- b. He is Paul, the prisoner *'of the Lord', 'for the Lord', 'in the Lord', or, 'for the sake of the Master.'*
  - (A) this is not said to elicit sympathy
  - (B) we saw in chapter 3 of this book, that Paul looked on his imprisonment as a privilege on their behalf
  - (C) Paul is using his situation and his loyalty to his Lord
    - (1) as a reminder to the loyalty we owe to the Lord
    - (2) and as an example to us of the humility of spirit that is a personality of unity
- c. the word *'implore'*, a strong entreaty can be translated *'beseech', 'entreat', 'urge', or 'beg'*
  - (A) it means to call alongside, and is the basis of one of the names of the Holy Spirit, that of Paraclete, the one called alongside to help, to lead, to teach
  - (B) in my first two or three years in public school, I spent a lot of time being called alongside my teacher's desk, where I stood while she tried to get my attention to do something: to listen, to stop talking, to behave
  - (C) Paul is calling his listeners alongside to hear this very important teaching: you are saints residing in Christ; you have been called with a heavenly calling; now, as you reside upon this earth, remember that! ... now, let your walk be heavenly as your Father is heavenly
- d. this verse gives us two prerequisites for Biblical unity:

2. the first prerequisite for Biblical unity

- a. is that those being united are those who have accepted the gracious call of God to salvation – *'the calling with which you have been called'*– the call of Jesus to salvation
  - (A) *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28)
  - (B) *Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his*

innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive ...” (John 7:37-39a)

(C) and you can see the connection here with that verse already quoted in 1 Corinthians, ‘... for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...’

b. any attempt at a unity which is not composed of those who are regenerate by the Holy Spirit is doomed

3. the second prerequisite for Biblical unity

a. is that those being united are seeking to live according to the call, or vocation, they have received from God – ‘walk in a manner worthy’

b. that word worthy shows up in the English in mathematics as the word ‘axiom’ – used to express the equivalence of two things. It was used originally to describe the balance beam in a pair of scales. Our walk, the way we live, should balance our talk, the things we say that we believe. The truth of our sainthood in Christ, should show in saintly living in the world in which we reside.

c. what hope can there be, then, for unity, if we as children of God continue to live as if children of this fallen world? — this becomes evident as we look at

C. The Personality of Biblical Unity

1. Biblical unity takes its personality from the God we serve

a. earlier this morning we read that OT call to worship: ‘Hear, O Israel, Jehovah our God is One Jehovah’ (Deut. 6:4, ASV)

b. the epitome of unity is the eternal unity that subsists among the three Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as is shown in the last part of today’s text

c. God’s personality is perfect, unified without contradiction; as His children we are to partake of that same personality so that we, too, may be as one. In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.” (John 17:21-23)

d. so, what are the personality traits we should cultivate that lead to Biblical unity?

2. We read first that we are to walk 'with all humility' . . . . . 4:2a
- a. Humility or lowliness of mind was a radical new virtue
    - (A) the Greeks and Romans did not consider it such
    - (B) they thought of it in terms of cringing servility
    - (C) and rather elevated high-mindedness; self-esteem
    - (D) things have not changed much in the secular world
    - (E) a couple of weeks ago we had a young man in our service and this week I drove him to the airport as he headed abroad to work. On the way, he mentioned that he was disappointed with the co-op program of the college he had attended. It seemed, he thought, to be geared to accumulating a set of bullets one could use to build up a high-sounding résumé.
    - (F) quite the opposite of "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)
  - b. this personality of humility or lowliness of mind, is one where we make an honest assessment of ourselves – that we are but sinners, saved by grace – and thereby frame our actions accordingly: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves;" (Philippians 2:3)
  - c. and in this we imitate our Saviour, for that passage goes on to say, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus," (Philippians 2:5), and describe Jesus' humility
3. We are also to walk, 'with all ... gentleness' . . . . . 4:2b
- a. gentleness or meekness, is often confused with weakness
  - b. meekness brings to my mind a very vivid picture, that of those huge animals, the elephant. With ease, they can lift tremendous sized logs with their trunks and carry them for a great distance. Yet, with those same muscular trunks, they can gently lift their rider boys onto their backs. That is meekness: strength under control in order to serve
  - c. let met read further from Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle {or, meek} and humble in heart ..." (28-29a)
  - d. Jesus was meek; he was not weak; Jesus could have called a legion of angels to deliver himself from death, but he went meekly to the cross to redeem us

4. The next personality trait has us walk with **'patience'** . . . . . 4:2c
  - a. in high school, our chemistry teacher has a substance in a jar of water, kept in a dark, locked cupboard. One day he took out the jar, cut off a small piece and put it on a plate. He put away the jar and in a few seconds, the piece on the plate burst into flame. It was white phosphorus  $\beta$ . It has a very low flash point and exposed to air, spontaneously combusts. Some people are like that – they have a low flash point – we speak of them as 'short-tempered'
  - b. patience or longsuffering is to be 'long-tempered'
  - c. it is one of the five facets of the goodness of God that we have been looking at in our adult Bible class
  - d. it is an aspect of God's goodness whereby He can justly delay judgement so that people can come to salvation
  
5. How can we check if we possess a personality of unity? ... Paul tells us that it will become evident in these ways ...
  
6. first, in our **'showing tolerance for one another in love'** . . . . . 4:2d
  - a. Paul didn't see Christians through rose-coloured glasses
  - b. He knew, as we do, their irritating, annoying faults
  - c. forbearance or tolerance is a practical application of love
  - d. it's counting to ten instead of yelling at them
  - e. it's seeking to walk in their shoes, appreciate their feelings, bearing their **'burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ'** (Gal 6:2)
  
7. second, in our **'being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'** . . . . . 4:3
  - a. unity takes active effort: it requires diligence; translated as **'endeavouring'** (AV), **'earnestly striving'** (Alford), **'make every effort'** (NIV); but,
  - b. we are not told here to create unity, but to preserve or keep that unity of which the Holy Spirit is the source
  - c. remember that verse we read that **by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body?** – that is the source of unity: the common experience of the transforming power of the Spirit which initiated our new life in

Christ: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5 NAS95)

d. the peace that we have in Christ will be the unifying glue

D. The Platform under Biblical Unity . . . . . 4:4-6

1. Paul now abruptly interrupts his exhortation

a. listing 7 'One's' – 7 spiritual unities, 7 truths, 7 verities

b. seven planks of a platform, if you like, upon which any Biblical unity must rest

c. we live in a pluralistic society; many gods, many ways to such a god or gods; but our unity is based on seven eternal spiritual verities, truths that cannot be compromised

d. there are seven sermons in these seven truths, but I will forgo those and simply make a minimal comment on each

2. One Body – in eternity there will only be one church; the joke about the Baptists being in their own little corner unaware of all the others in heaven, is just that, a joke. Never forget that you are part of an innumerable, worldwide company of faith

3. One Spirit – every believer is made one because we were born of the Holy Spirit, we were made part of the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and the self-same Holy Spirit indwells us

4. One Hope – Heaven is wide open, without walls or barriers; one group does not have more of an inheritance than another; it isn't like the Air Canada Centre with a set of luxury suites for some subscribers; they are all luxury suites ... mansions!

5. One Lord – a basic unifying plank on which we rest is that we have one master, a master who possesses and rules us. Romans 14:4 tells us, that among other things, this means we have no right to a judgmental, divisive attitude to a fellow Christian.

6. One Faith – not merely that we have a statement of faith to which can agree and adhere, but that our lives are committed in trust to the saving Person and Work of that One Lord



7. One Baptism – again, not the external rite which is but a symbol of an internal reality, but the internal reality itself, the Spirit baptism whereby we [‘were baptized into one body’](#)
8. One God and Father – what can I say? ... where can I begin? ... is this not the most precious of all the planks? ... that we are one family, and that the Almighty God of creation, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob is our Father God: Abba

#### E. Conclusion

1. just because the platform on which the unity of the church rests is found in seven eternal, spiritual truths, that does not mean unity is not for the here but only the hereafter – quite the opposite – we are to walk, here in this physical, temporal world, in a manner in keeping with our spiritual, eternal calling – these are the steps to Biblical unity that will win unbelievers
2. « Closing Hymn: The Church’s One Foundation, Praise! 131 »

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com). Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. The ‘[therefore](#)’ in Greek is a postpositive particle and so falls second in the clause, but its import is to introduce the clause (here, a section) in an inferential fashion.