

Fact Sheet for **“Unity”**  
**Ephesians 4:1-16**

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When Christians are following the Word of God and are in step with the Spirit of God the body of Christ can be a wonderful place. But when Christians are following their baser instincts and are not listening to the Spirit's voice the body of Christ can be difficult at best.

In Ephesians 1-3 Paul wrote about our calling by the Father, our salvation in Christ, and our sealing with the Holy Spirit. In 2:8 he wrote “For through him (Christ) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access in one Spirit to the Father.” Now he jumps right into the unity that should characterize the body of Christ.

ESV <sup>1</sup> ¶ **I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,**

Remember that Paul wrote this letter from a prison cell. In verses 1-6 Paul wrote about the unity that God desires among Christians. This is part of what He has called us to. The word “worthy” is literally “bringing up the other beam of the scales” or “bringing into equilibrium”.<sup>1</sup> In other words our walk should be in step with our calling.

<sup>2</sup> **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,**

“humility” – In classical Greek this was “a derogatory term suggesting low-mindedness and groveling servility”<sup>2</sup> to be practiced only by slaves. This word was redeemed by the gospel to represent a distinctly Christian virtue. Its opposite “pride” promotes disunity. And Christ was the supreme example of true humility (Philippians 2:5-8).

“gentleness” – Another word for this is “meekness”. This is the opposite of self-assertion, rudeness, and harshness. It doesn’t suggest weakness though. Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Christ (Matthew 11:29) both were known for this trait.

“patience” – literally “long to anger” – It is the self-restraint that does not hastily retaliate a perceived wrong.

<sup>3</sup> **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

“Eager” can be translated “making every effort”. Christians who are not humble, not gentle, or not patient are in reality not eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit that God’s Word calls for. They are not walking in a manner worthy of their calling. Now consider the next seven terms, each beginning with the word “one”, and each emphasizing the unity that should exist among Christians.

<sup>4</sup> **There is one body** (the universal church) **and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—** <sup>5</sup> **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** <sup>6</sup> **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

This unity does not mean *absolute* unity of theological thought. It does mean the relational unity among Christians.

Now Paul continued to write of individual gifts that God gave to help produce this unity.

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<sup>1</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 1, p. 379.

<sup>2</sup> Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 11, p. 55.

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH HE LED A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."<sup>3</sup> <sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

What does this mean? The Apostle's Creed has one meaning in its line "He descended into hell". This view is based on a difficult passage to interpret (1 Peter 3:18-20). \_However these verses can be understood this to mean that Christ made proclamation to these people when they were alive on the earth. \_Christ descending to the "lower regions" could easily just be a reference to his incarnation. \_Look at verse 9 in the ESV again.

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

Here are three other translations of Ephesians 4:9 that take the same view.

<sup>NET</sup> **Ephesians 4:9** Now what is the meaning of "he ascended," except that he also descended to the lower regions, namely, the earth?

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 4:9** (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?

<sup>NLT</sup> **Ephesians 4:9** Notice that it says "he ascended." This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world.

<sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Another word for "fill" is "fulfill". Paul then wrote of four gifted offices given to the church, all which should promote unity among Christians.

<sup>11</sup> And he gave (1) the apostles, (2) the prophets, (3) the evangelists, (4) the shepherds and teachers<sup>4</sup>,

Remember that two of these gifts were foundational for the church (2:19-20). There is a strong indication here that these two offices are not now in operation. Then Paul describes their role.

<sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

The work of ministry is to be done by us all. And the unity of the faith that Paul wrote about earlier ("one faith") is based on sound doctrine, which is to be applied by individual believers.

<sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Learning always about our calling from God's Word... and balancing our calling with humility, gentleness (meekness), patience, and love... will promote the unity between believers that God desires.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 68:18.

<sup>4</sup> There is a strong grammatical reason in Greek to understand "shepherds and teachers" as referring to the same office.