**CHRISTIAN UNITY AND THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD**

***As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3******Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4******There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all***.

 Ephesians 4:1-6 (NIV)

For three chapters Paul has been unfolding the eternal purposes of God being worked out in history. Through Jesus Christ and by His death and resurrection God is creating something entirely new, not just a new life for individuals for a new society. Paul sees an alienated humanity being reconciled, a fractured humanity being united, even a new humanity being created.

Now we move on from the new society to the new standards which are expected of it. Paul turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done (indicative) to what we must be and do (imperative), from doctrine to duty.

‘*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge* you *…’* (4:1). He has taught them and he has prayed for them (1:15-23; 3:14-19); now he makes his appeal. Instruction, intercession and exhortation work best in this order. Paul describes himself as ‘*a prisoner for the Lord.’* He is both a prisoner of Christ and a prisoner for Christ, bound by chains of love and chains of iron.

‘*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received’*(4:1). The new society God is calling into being has two characteristics. First, it is ‘one’ people, composed equally of Jews and Gentiles, the single family of God. Secondly, it is a ‘holy’ people, distinct from the secular world, set apart (as Israel was in Old Testament days) to belong to God. Because God’s people are called to be one people, they must manifest their unity, and because they are called to be a holy people, they must manifest their purity. Unity and purity are two fundamental features of a life worthy of the church’s divine calling. Paul treats the unity of the church in 4:1-16 and the purity of the church in 4:17 – 5:21.

Paul elaborates four truths about the kind of oneness God intends His new society to experience;

1. It depends on the godliness of our character and conduct (4:2)
2. It comes from the unity of our God (4:3-6)
3. It is enriched by the diversity of our gifts (4:7-12)
4. It demands the maturity of our growth (4:13-16)
5. Christian unity depends on the godliness of our conduct (4:2)

Paul describes the life worthy of our calling characterised by four qualities – humility, gentleness, patience and bearing in love.

The Greek noun here for ‘humility’ (‘*be … humble’*) doesn’t seem to have been used before New Testament times and the corresponding adjective was nearly always used negatively of slave-like subservience. In Christ, humility became an extraordinary virtue. His life and death were service and sacrifice without thought of reputation (Philippians 2:6,7). Because we are called to follow in His steps, humility is an irreplaceable essential to Christian character (cf. Acts 20:19). Humility is essential to unity. The people we instinctively get along best with are those who we feel respect and favour us. We find an instinctive inability to make real friends of people we feel don’t respect and favour us. Behind this very natural reaction is, unfortunately, our own self-centredness.

The second word is ‘gentleness.*’* If ‘meekness’ was still common to our vocabulary, it would be a better alternative. Gentleness is too easily interpreted as weakness. Paul’s word was used of the gentleness of the strong whose strength is under control. It describes the quality of the strong who willingly lay down the independence of their strength to serve others. The meek don’t assert personal rights, not because they can’t but because they choose not to.

‘Humility’ and ‘gentleness’ form a natural pair. The humble don’t promote their personal claims nor do the gentle their personal merits. Both qualities were found in perfect balance in Christ who described Himself as ‘*gentle and humble in heart’* (Matthew 11:29).

Paul’s third word is ‘patience’ which means slowness in avenging wrong or retaliating when hurt by others. The word is used of God’s patience toward humanity (Romans 2:4; 9:22; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 3:20).

The final quality is ‘forbearing,’ that mutual tolerance without which no group of people can live together in peace. Forbearance describes the ability to bear with one another’s weaknesses and not ceasing to love others because of their weaknesses and faults. This is an obvious attribute of God (Romans 2:4). Forbearance, as with each of other three qualities, is only possible ‘*in love’* (4:2). Paul has prayed that his readers be ‘*rooted and established in* l*ove*’ (3:17) and he sees this love outworked in each of the four qualities. Paul saw love having a binding property to it (Colossians 3:14).

1. Christian unity depends on the unity of our God (4:3-6)

‘*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’* (4:3). Paul sees this unity as God’s gift, made possible by the cross of Christ (2:14ff) and made effective through the Holy Spirit. We can’t create it. It is given to us, but our responsibility is to keep it, to guard it in the face of many attempts both from within and outside the church to take it away. Paul uses a word here translated ‘*make every effort’* that means zealous effort and care (1 Thessalonians 2:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 1:10,15). This unity can only be kept ‘*through the bond of peace*.’ Paul is encouraging the church to maintain the church’s unity visibly. We are to preserve in concrete relationships, ‘*through the bond of peace*,’ (the peace which binds us together), the unity God has created.

4:4-6 form a creedal summary which might have been part of an early Christian hymn. Paul names what his readers have in common – a unity by the Spirit in the church (4:4), a unity in Christ acknowledged and confessed as Lord (4:5), and a unity ultimately in God the Father and source of all (4:6).

*‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called’* (4:4). The ‘*one body’* is the church, the body of Christ, comprising Jewish and Gentile believers, and its unity and cohesion is due to the one Holy Spirit who indwells and animates it (Romans 8:9).

All who have the Spirit have a common ‘*hope*.’ We may have come from a vast number of backgrounds but our goal is the same. The Spirit is the guarantee (1:14) and the down payment that in the end we will all stand together in God’s presence and be restored fully into His likeness and possess His inheritance.

‘*There is … one Lord, one faith, one baptism’*(4:4,5). The ‘*one Lord’* is the Lord Jesus Christ. As 1 Corinthians 12:3 shows, this was the most basic, early Christian creed (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:11). It expresses a common belief and a common allegiance to only one Lord. This declaration binds true Christians together. Where there is ‘*the same Lord’* (Romans 10:12), Jews and Gentiles, black and white, rich and poor, great and small, are yoked together. Neither personal ambition, party spirit, nor disputes about non-essentials will be allowed to break that unity, if Christ is really honoured and served as Lord.

The ‘*one faith’* embraces the same trust that binds us all to Christ, the ‘*one Lord*,’ the same way of access to Him and means of life in Him. It could also mean the same vital truths concerning Christ, His life and purpose. This way of speaking of ‘the faith’ was more common later (1 Timothy 3:9; 4;1,6; Titus 1;4; Jude 3).

The ‘*one baptism’*’ is baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27), outwardly demonstrated by water baptism but closely associated with the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Water baptism symbolises the spiritual cleansing which the Holy Spirit brings.

*‘There is … one God and Father of all, who is* *over all and through all and in all’*(4:4,6). Humanity was created in God’s image in the beginning (Genesis 1:26) and through Christ can be brought back to His family (1:5). All Christians are part of this family and share the conviction that God is their Father. He is ‘*over all and through all and in all.*’ A few manuscripts read ‘*over all and through all and in you all.’* Adding ‘you’ at the end makes the reference clearly to all Christians and not all people. The overwhelming manuscript evidence doesn’t support the added word though it clarifies Paul’s thinking for the average reader. Paul was probably thinking of both Jew and Gentile believers when he wrote ‘*you all.*’

Paul has written about ‘*one Spirit … one Lord … one God,*’ the reversal of the usual order. This is because he has spoken of the Spirit in 4:3. This leads to a natural transition of Spirit, Lord, Father. The same order for the same reason occurs in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 where Paul has spoken of the Spirit in 12:3.

Reversing the order, and summarising, we have the one Father creates the one family; the one Son creates the one faith, hope and baptism, and the one Spirit creates the one body. There can only be one Christian family, only one Christian faith, hope and baptism, and only one Christian body, because there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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