

9. Learning How to Keep the Unity of the Spirit

In our last topic, we saw the prayer of Paul for his spiritual children. Paul gave us an example of the way that we should pray for our physical and spiritual children. We also saw that God is able to do much more than we can ever imagine as we empty ourselves of sin and our selfish desires so that our lives can be filled with all of the fullness of God. As that happens in our lives, God will work mightily in our lives and through our lives. In our topic today, we see that we want to help our children learn to keep the unity of the Spirit.

Paul had shared with the Ephesian Christians how he prayed for them. Now, as the prisoner of Christ he begins to share with them how to live if they want to see the Lord do more through their lives than they can ever imagine. Ephesians 4:1-3 says, “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.” We have seen the great calling to which the Lord has called every Christian. Here, we see that we are to walk worthy of that calling. The word that is translated “walk” means *the way that we conduct our daily lives*. The word that is translated “worthy” means *in a manner worthy of or in a way that is pleasing to the Lord*.

The phrase “walk worthy” is used two other times in the New Testament. In Colossians 1:9-11, in a prayer of Paul for the Colossians we read, “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.” Here, we see that Paul prayed that the Colossians would walk worthy of God. Then, in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” In these verses, we see that Paul, Silas and Timothy had provided the Christians in Thessalonica an example of what it means to walk worthy of God. Through prayer and example, we can also see our physical and spiritual children learn to walk worthy of God in their lives.

Here, in Ephesians 4:2-3, we see several characteristics of a worthy walk. The word that is translated “lowliness” means *to have a humble opinion of one’s self*. The Greeks and the Romans did not even have a word for humble or humility so this word was developed by the Christians by putting two Greek words together. The word that is translated “gentleness” is one of the nine characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. The word is used again in Galatians 6:1 where we read, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that even if a Christian is caught in the very act of a trespass, he is to be restored in the spirit of gentleness so that we will not be tempted to sin ourselves.

The word that is translated “longsuffering” speaks of patience or endurance and is the attitude that we demonstrate if we have a humble and gentle attitude. The word that is translated “bearing with” means *to suffer patiently or endure with love*. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” It is love that is patient with others that is necessary in order to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We see Paul often spoke of that unity. Philippians 2:2-3 says, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” As we walk in humbleness and submission to the Spirit, it is possible to maintain that unity.

Ephesians 4:4-6 says, “*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.” All true Christians are part of one body. In order to function as one, we must all recognize that Christ is the head and then minister in the power of the Spirit. We all have the same hope because we all look forward to eternal life. Christ must be Lord in our lives because our faith is in Him. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” Finally, we are also reminded that just as we have the Holy Spirit and Christ in our lives, we also have the Father in our lives and He is the One who is above all things.

As we go on to Ephesian 4:7-10 we read, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, ‘*He ascended*’--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)” Since the church is one body, it has unity. At the same time, just like in the physical body, every part is unique. No two Christians are the same just as no two parts of the body are the same. Even though we have two ears, they are on different sides of the head and so must have a different shape.

“Grace” speaks of our salvation. However, Romans 12:6 also reminds us that we are given different spiritual gifts by grace. That verse says, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith.” We can use the letters of the word “shape” to help us understand why every Christian is unique. The “s” reminds us that we each have different spiritual gifts. The “h” reminds us that God has given each of us a different heart or passion for a different kind of ministry. The “a” reminds us that God has given each of us different abilities. The “p” reminds us that God has given each of us a different personality. The “e” reminds us that God has allowed each of us to have different experiences in life.

Verse 8 is taken from Psalm 68:18 where we read, “You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, *even from* the rebellious, that the LORD God might dwell *there*.” David wrote Psalm 68 after the Lord had given him victory over the Jebusites that lived in the city of Jerusalem. In the time of David, the conquering king would bring home the things that had been captured in that city. Here, we see that Paul used that as an

illustration of the return of Christ to heaven after His death and resurrection. Christ conquered Satan by His death and resurrection and set free those who had once been sinners and prisoners of Satan. Christ also gives each Christian spiritual gifts just as David gave gifts to the people from the things that were captured when Jerusalem was conquered.

Christ came to this earth where He carried out His ministry of equipping the disciples. However, before He returned to heaven He willingly went to the cross to carry out the will of the Father by making payment for our sins. Then, His body was placed in the grave and Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth. On the cross, Christ told the one thief in Luke 23:43, “And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’” Before Christ paid the penalty for sin, Old Testament saints could not go directly to heaven because the price for their sins had not yet been paid. As a result, they went to hades which contained two parts – the place of torment and Abraham’s bosom (Paradise). Luke 16:23 describes where the rich man went when it says “‘And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.’” As a result, when Christ died, He descended into the part of hades known as Paradise.

On the day that Christ rose from the dead, He took Paradise and everyone in Paradise and presented them to the Father in heaven. (This means that hades (hell) now only has the part called the place of torment where all unbelievers go at death.) As a result, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 tells us that Paradise is now located in the third heaven. Those verses say, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Here, we see that to be caught up into the third heaven is to be caught up into Paradise.

Christ is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father because He fulfilled all of the ministries promised about His first coming. In a later topic, we will see in Ephesians 4:15-16 that Christ is the head of the church. Since Christ conquered death, He has the authority to give gifts. For each of us who have become Christians since the resurrection and been set free from being the prisoners of Satan, Christ has also given us spiritual gifts just like David gave gifts from the spoils of Jerusalem to the people. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that these gifts are not for self -glory. Instead, they are the gifts of the risen Christ that are given to each member of His church to make it possible for us to serve Him effectively and in unity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the importance of keeping the unity of the Spirit.