

## OUR GIFTING FOR HIS UNITY

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### Ephesians 4:1-16

#### Walk in Unity

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.

#### Spiritual Gifts

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.)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

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This is considered to be the first in the order of prison epistles by the Apostle Paul. That is, there was a period in which he was imprisoned, to which he put that time to good use in writing to the churches, of whom he was familiar with. There are four letters by Paul that are considered to be his prison epistles, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and then Philemon. Paul was first apprehended in Jerusalem in Acts 21 and then taken to Caesarea and temporarily imprisoned there. Caesarea was a coastal city on the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

If you have a heart for travel, I suppose that is one way to go about it. But Paul didn't initially have time, to take in the sites, and

rest in a beach chair, on the Mediterranean shore, while sipping on some raspberry tea. He was on a mission to preach the gospel, or the good news, of Christ Jesus and was continually being used by God to encourage the early Christian churches from Jerusalem, all the way across the Mediterranean Sea to Rome, Italy. Now as Paul had appealed to Caesar, meaning he wanted Caesar to know of, and rule over his case, he was then sent to Rome and imprisoned there.

As was with Paul and all of the apostles, so it is with us. God is still presently building His eternal kingdom, in calling all who will listen, to receive His glorious plan for our salvation in Christ Jesus. Paul argues the point of the necessity for us to be sharing (and showing) the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (**Romans 10:14-17**)

That does not mean we go at people shouting at them and condemning them to hell unless they repent. Paul is beseeching or pleading with his readers (that's us) 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." When we think of God working in us we think of His working in us His righteousness and love, but all of the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." (**Galatians 5:22-23**)

Whether we are called to be apostles, or prophets, or evangelists, or pastors, or teachers, or whatever our calling by God, we are first called to believe on and receive Christ Jesus. When we receive Him, we then become part of the body of Christ, the family of God, to where God uses each of us in establishing the unity of the faith in Christ Jesus! There's nothing wrong with us thanking and recognizing those of the body of Christ who have labored according to the calling that God has given them. We are also intended to respect the calling by God on his people. Yet we always can be reminded of who we are, that is, we are all sinners saved by the wonderful grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (**Ephesians 2:8-9**)

God isn't finished with us though once we are "saved", right? "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which

God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (vs. 10) At the top of the heap of what God is working in us is that He is working in us His Righteousness, making us into the very image of Christ. For as we know from **1 John 3:2**, when we see our Lord and Savior Jesus, we will be made like Him. Yet He is also teaching us to walk in the humility and gentleness of God, bearing with one another in love. That starts to **become** us, as we spend time in His Word, and we submit ourselves, in all things to Him, in prayer, in our attitudes, and in our calling. There will be a time for us to reign with Him, but for now, that is what God expects of us. Amen?

In **2 Corinthians 11:23**, Paul mentions being frequently imprisoned. We know he and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi (**Acts 16**), to where they were singing hymns to God, and there was a great earthquake, and they were freed from their bonds, and the doors of the jail opened. That led to the jailer and his family coming to salvation in Christ.

All of Paul’s prison epistles though are believed to have been written during his “imprisonment” in Rome. He was treated pretty good there, as he was staying in his own rented house during the two years of his imprisonment. In a commentary about that in the Scofield Study Bible it says,

“It has been much disputed whether Paul endured two Roman imprisonments from A.D. 60-68, or one. The tradition from Clement to Eusebius favors two imprisonments with a year of liberty between them. It has been pointed out that that the leaving of Trophimus sick at Miletus (**2 Timothy 4:20**) could not have been an occurrence of Paul’s last journey to Jerusalem, for then Trophimus was not left (**Acts 20:4; 21:29**); nor could it have been on his journey to Rome to appear before Caesar, for then he did not touch at Miletus. To make this incident possible, there must have been a release from the first imprisonment and an interval of ministry and travel.”

To anyone who may be thinking, “so what? What does this have to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ?”, I applaud you. That is really the point I intend to make. We are ultimately called to be sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ which can be summed up by Jesus saying that greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind and that the second commandment is to love our neighbors (even those perceived to be our enemy), as ourselves. (**Mark 12:30-32**) As Paul said to Timothy, in **2 Timothy 3:16-17**, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Paul doesn’t say that all Scripture is for knowing every minutia of details that took place from the time of God’s creation to His final judgment upon the earth

and the following eternal reign of Christ in His new kingdom, to where there will be a new heaven and a new earth. (**Revelation 21:1**) There is what is called a Guiding Principle in our need for agreement on some things and a resigning to agree to disagreement on others. 1. In Essentials-Unity. There's no getting around Jesus saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (**John 14:6**) Jesus IS God's one and only plan of salvation. 2. In Non-Essentials Liberty 3. In All Things-Charity (love).

In speaking to Ananias about Saul (Paul), in **Acts 9**, God says, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (**Acts 9:15-16**) I used to look at that and get the impression that God was sounding like a mean, vindictive God, that He was going to get Paul back for his persecuting the church. But that is not what God was saying. As Paul told Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (**2 Timothy 3:12**) Likewise, Jesus told His disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (**John 16:33**)

Jesus knew very well of the suffering and persecution. He, "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (**Philippians 2:7-11**) We are given the choice. Will we live for God in His kingdom, full of great promises of blessings, or not. In that though we are in a great spiritual battle, God and His people, versus Satan and his minions. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (**Ephesians 6:12**) As the saying goes, "the struggle is real." Once again, we can remind ourselves that Jesus HAS overcome the world. We just have to cling to Him, for He is our life!

There had been a great price to pay, for reconciling us back to God, to be forgiven of our sins, and to have eternal life in His kingdom. It started with Jesus having to bear our sins upon himself on the cross. Peter spoke of Jesus, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (**1 Peter 3:18**) That we might live for righteousness! To say we want to be saved and

forgiven of our sins is us acknowledging to God that we want His Righteousness. Paul, in speaking to the Galatians, wrote, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (**Galatians 3:13-15**) We receive His Spirit of Righteousness!

That promise of the Holy Spirit is the sealing of the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 1:21-23**, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." That is the being "born-again" that Jesus said is necessary, for all of us, in order to be saved and have eternal life in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads us to repentance (**Romans 2:4**, "the goodness of God leads you to repentance"), which is the changing of our minds to live for God and not for ourselves. It is having Jesus as our Lord and not us being our own gods. We are then believing on Christ Jesus as dying on the cross for our sins and then receiving Him into our hearts. It is then that He leads us in His Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

For our passage of Scripture we have Paul saying, "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." Can you recall another time Paul used that phrase, "I beseech you"? **Romans 12:1-2**, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." It could be said then that the Holy Spirit is leading us in repentance, a changing of the mind, each and every day.

The perfect will of God is that He is making us to be like our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. We are not being made to be our own god. The more you get to know Jesus, hopefully, the more you love Him with all of your heart and you want to be like Him. Just as a child who reveres and looks up to a parent or some other adult, they will want to imitate them, and be like them. It really does become our role as children of God, to where others like what they see in us and determine for themselves that they want what we have. That is where we can tell them about Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

Paul says, in all "longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I've learned that sometimes some things aren't worth discussing with others. With some, politics may be a trigger topic that can cause division. Hopefully religion isn't a topic of division with you and a brother or sister in Christ. The end-all of that topic could then be to say, "we all need Jesus!" Is it important to argue with someone about how many times Paul was imprisoned? Is it profitable? That may be a silly example but it hopefully makes the point. God is calling us into the unity of faith in Christ Jesus. We are not compromising our faith in Christ. Yet, there are some things that just don't matter. For that person that may disagree with you, you can be praying that God opens their understanding so that they will see that you are right. I'm kidding, of course.

Paul goes on to say, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." Does everyone operate in the same measure of faith? No, Paul mentions that in **Romans 12:3**. Those gifts that Paul speaks of, that God gives to His children, are not, of course, just so that we can be puffed up in pride, and say to others, "look at me!" God gifts us all differently, but it is all for His bringing us into the unity of faith in Christ Jesus. If you are unsure of your giftings from God, you can ask Him to reveal them to you. Some gifts He may reveal right away. Others He may not reveal them until it is His proper time for you to operate in them. Yet, as for all of God's children, all those who have believed on Christ and received Him, have giftings from God that He uses towards the building of His eternal kingdom, in bringing His people together in the unity of the faith.

I like to say, there's God (up there), and then there's us (sinners saved by grace). We are ALL very important to the body of Christ. Even if you feel like you're only equivalent to a pinkie toe in the body of Christ, for anyone who has jammed a pinkie toe against a piece of furniture, that sends pain signals throughout the whole body. Paul says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it." (**1 Corinthians 12:26**) What is typical with us imperfect humans is that if one part suffers, then that is not the time to talk about them and to kick them to the curb. Paul says, "speaking the truth in love [and we can add, that we should be praying for one another], may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

What that may remind you of, as it did me, is what Jesus was praying, just before His crucifixion and death. He prayed, "I do not pray for these alone [speaking of the disciples], but also for those who will

believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20-23)

What that should say to each of us that "it ain't just about you". God is presently bringing His people into His family, the family of God, is getting us to live according to His Righteousness, and that we are then used by God to help encourage, bless, and love others into His eternal kingdom. Jesus demonstrated to us in His prayer in John 17, how important it is for us to be praying for one another. Anytime that we be get discouraged at a lack of unity, think on this. It is so very important to God that it is a primary focus of the enemy of our souls, to get us divided. Do you think that having 1000s of different denominations is God's perfect plan for His people? Nevertheless, God still works through our failings and weaknesses.

One last thing I want to mention. God is already promising us that we will be glorified in Christ, be joint-heirs with Christ, and that we will reign with Him, for all of eternity. We are His workmanship. He has the perfect plan for each of us according to His eternal purpose. We don't have to concern ourselves with trying to get another jewel in our crown. We just have to trust Him that He knows what He is doing. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6) And on that path we are "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" that we "may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

We can see on one level, how that works when we are working in unity, when we set up and then put things away together. The same thing is happening with our community when we are all operating according to God's calling on each of us. That ends up impacting our whole community. A spark here, a spark there. Regardless of the direction the world is heading, we can make a difference individually and then also collectively. We are all being called into the unity IN CHRIST JESUS. As Paul said, you are "called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all." While we can agree to disagree about non-essentials, all of what we should do or say show be motivated by the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. To God be the glory! Amen.