

Ephesians: Blessed Beyond Belief to Build up the Body

Lesson 7: Walk in Unity Ephesians 4:1-6

Small Group Questions

1. What does pride look like?
2. What does maturity look like?
3. How do you know if some is mature?
4. How do you know if someone is humble?
5. What causes disunity? List as many causes as possible.
6. What can keep a church from developing, maintaining and enjoying unity and fellowship?
7. What is the result of disunity?

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- IX. Conclusion 6:21-24

Review

1:1–3:21 Positional Unity of the Church

1:1-23 God’s (life insurance) plan and benefits

1:1-2 A circular letter to those “in Christ”

Paul writes to those “in Christ—that they might experience God’s grace and peace.

1:3-14 Believers have: **Every spiritual blessing—to the praise of His glory**

The plan, provision and protection of Salvation

God is blessed, because He has blessed those “in Christ” with every spiritual blessing

“God has enriched believers with every spiritual benefit for their spiritual well-being.”¹

A reminder of the great things God has done for the individual believer

WOW—it is all about God

All we have in salvation is for His praise and glory.

1:15-23 Prayer for insight to truly know God

The prayer for those who have everything—know God better

Prayer for personal insight to their relationship with God for the purpose of deeper experiential appreciation of their riches benefits

To realizing the hope, riches and power on their behalf—which is evidenced by Christ current exalted position

Paul prays that believer’s know God personally and intimately—so that they would realize the hope of their calling (past), the riches of His inheritance in the saints (value) (future) and the extent of His power on their behalf (present)—which is evidenced by the power to raise and seat Christ and to subject all things to Him and to give Him to the Church as sufficient head (make Him head of the Church).

Why did He do this?

“In chapters 2 and 3 Paul explains the execution of the eternal plan by showing how God makes sinners into saints and builds them into the church, the body of Christ. In 2:1-10 Paul states how sinners, who deserve nothing but God’s wrath, become trophies of his grace.”²

2:1–3:21 Steps towards fulfilling God’s plan

2:1-10 God’s plan (1:3-14) applied to individuals

Man’s condition 2:1-3

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 301.

² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 305.

Apart from God man is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin
Condition apart from God (2:1-3)

- though dead in trespasses and sin resulting from
- nature/life—walk according to the values of the world
- devil—are controlled by the ruler of the world
- and actions of the will (enjoyment of sin)

“But God” (God’s provision) 2:4-10

Man’s condition, apart from God is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin
as a result of their walking according to the values of the world, are controlled by the ruler of
the world, and by actions in keeping with their desires.

But God

Who is rich in mercy (character), motivated by His great love (cause)

Applied His power to make believers alive, raised, and seated with Christ, so that they
would be a revelation of God’s grace

Based on His grace provided a gift

—a relationship with Him—no longer separated (dead) but unified (alive) as an
expression of the surpassing rich of His grace

Obtained through faith

—not works

For the purpose of doing good works

—to reveal God’s grace through actions

- Character—Who is rich in mercy
- Motivated—By His great love
- Based on—His grace
- Provided a gift
- Obtained—through faith
- Purpose—to do good works, which reveal God’s grace in action

2:11–3:13 God’s plan applied corporately

2:11-22 Our new position corporately

Now have been brought near to God and have been made into a new man—entity

2:11-12 Formerly

Those who were hopeless

Separated from God’s promises
and Messiah—given to Israel

2:13-22 Now have been brought near to God

And have been made into a new man—entity

3:1-13

The mystery of the Church is revealed after Christ

Paul explains his role as administrator and dispenser of the mystery to the Gentiles

The church is not natural—unity in spite of diversity is difficult

To show the wisdom of God—even to the cosmic powers

3:14-21 Prayer and Praise

3:14-19 Prayer for the Ephesians to know and experience Christ’s love and experience maturity filled by
God

The impossibly big prayer for intimacy and to be total consumed with God

3:20-21 Doxology: Praise to God for His superabounding

4:1–6:9 The Proper Conduct of the Church

4:1-16 Call to a mature unity

4:1-6 Walk in Unity (Call for Unity)

Unity—the unifying or overarching theme of the whole section

4:1 Therefore walk in a manner worthy!!!!

How can we not desire to walk in a manor worthy of our calling when we have been planned for, provided for, protected by, prayed for, sacrificed for, saved by, seated with, loved, liberated, lifted, unified, to the fullest with every spiritual blessing, with the surpassing greatness of His power, the fullness of Him who fills all in all, the riches of His great love, the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness, unfathomable riches, manifold wisdom, surpassing knowledge, who is able to do abundantly more than we could even ask or think?????

WOW

4:7-24 Ministry and Maturity

Introduction

Spend extra time developing the context of the rest of the book—from a practical standpoint.

What causes disunity?

What enables unity?

Questions

1. What does pride look like?
2. What does maturity look like?
3. How do you know if some is mature?
4. How do you know if someone is humble?
5. What causes disunity? List as many causes as possible.
6. What can keep a church from developing, maintaining and enjoying unity and fellowship?
7. What is the result of disunity?

As we go through this section I want you to think about two questions:

1. What is the key command?
2. How am I responding? How should I respond?

Context

Transition to the “practical” section.”

NO PASSAGE IS more descriptive of the church in action than Ephesians 4:1–16. Verse 1 marks a transition from the prayerful description of God’s grace and salvation in the first three chapters to an explanation of the consequences of grace in chapters 4–6. As noted in our discussion of 2:10,¹ Paul’s ethical instruction in Ephesians centers largely on the metaphor “walk” (Gk. *peripateo*; NIV, “live”). From 4:1 to at least 5:21 the ethical teaching is structured around this verb. Note the following:

- 4:1: “*walk* worthy of the calling with which you have been called”
- 4:17: “*walk* no longer as the Gentiles *walk*”
- 5:2: “*walk* in love”
- 5:8: “*walk* as children of light”
- 5:15: “Therefore be careful how you *walk*, not as unwise, but as wise”

¹ See pp. 94, 96, 115.

To a large extent, 4:1–16 provides the framework and specific theological basis for what follows in 4:17–6:20.

We ought not overemphasize the distinction between the theological material in chapters 1–3 and the ethical instruction in chapters 4–6. While the ethical teaching in chapters 1–3 is nearly all implicit, chapters 4–6 contain significant and explicit theological teaching. Note that 4:17–24 is a theological description contrasting two ways of life, much like 2:11–22.

Throughout the New Testament, ethical imperatives are based on theological indicatives. Obedience is always a response to grace. God acts first, and humans respond. Just as *kerygma* (proclamation) and *didache* (instruction) cannot be separated, neither can the indicative and the imperative. Often the two blend together in the same text. The imperative can be a means of preaching the gospel, for ethical statements can contain the whole gospel (cf. 5:1–2). In the passage before us, 4:4–16 provides theological support for the imperative in 4:1–3.³

Overview

The revelation of the unification of Jewish and Gentile believers positionally as “one new person” (2:15), the body of Christ, and the prayer that this unity would result in a mutual experience of Christ’s love (3:16–19) leads Paul to demonstrate the manner of walk expected of this unified body. This can only be accomplished by God’s own power through the ministry of gifted believers who Christ gives to the church. The purpose is to bring all the members of the body to the unity of faith and to the full stature of Christ with the result that they will be a stable and growing body in living union with Christ the head.⁴

The present passage focuses on life, order, unity, and the purpose of the church, as well as its diversity and difficulties. All five words summarizing Christianity appear here.³ In other words, ecclesiology and ethics cannot be separated.⁴ As we have noted, Christology is soteriology is ecclesiology is ethics,⁵ and this understanding continues throughout the letter.⁵

Prominence is given to “one,” “body,” “measure,” “build up,” and “love.” The occurrences of “in love” in 4:2 and 16 form an *inclusio*, bracketing the entire section. That is, everything in this ethic is marked by love.⁶

The readers have been reminded of the high destiny to which God has called them, and now they are shown that the hope of this calling requires them to live lives in keeping with it. Behaviour is thus seen in Ephesians as both response to what God has done in Christ, and as the proper accompaniment to the praise of God, the two themes present in chaps. 1–3.^{3 7}

Structure

4:1-6:9

4:1-16

4:1-6

4:1-3

³ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 194.

⁴ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 501.

³ “Grace,” “truth,” “faith,” “love,” and “hope.”

⁴ Barth, *Ephesians*, 2:451.

⁵ See p. 146.

⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996). 194-95.

⁶ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996). 195.

³ Best, 353.

⁷ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 272.

Exposition

I. Proper Conduct in the Church 4:1-6:9

A. Walk in Unity 4:1-16

1. Basis for unity 4:1-6

a. Command: Preserve the unity of Spirit by walking worthy of your call 4:1-3 Proper attitude for unity

Based on what has been said up to this point in the Letter (chapters 1-3).

1) Walk worthy 4:1

4:1 serves as the topic sentence for the rest of the letter.

I Therefore—clearly show the transition to the practical, exhortation section of the letter. All the rest of the exhortations in the letter are amplifications of what it means to “walk in a manner worthy of your calling.”

“Therefore” in light of the work of God through Christ to provide both the individual relationship with God and the corporate relationship to one another—what is required?

a prisoner of the Lord

See 3:1

Paul is a prisoner (literally) but what he focuses on is the true sphere—in Christ’s lordship.

The reference intimates

- the costly nature of his commitment
- his calling 3:2-5, 7, 8

Urge you—Reminiscent of Romans 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:1

Paul could have said, “exhort”—but by using “urge” it tones down the admonition making it sound like a request not a command, without losing resolve.

Most often when he uses “I urge you” it is followed by “brothers.”

He often associates the term ‘brothers’ with the phrase (Rom. 12:1; 15:32; 1 Cor. 16:15; 1 Thess. 4:10), but this word is lacking as an address in Ephesians, an omission that is in keeping with the general nature of the letter.⁸

Walk in a manner worthy

Walk—περιπατέω, aorist active infinitive—functional imperative

To comport oneself, to live, to behave—to live as habit of conduct
Lifestyle

To lead a life of...

Compare and contrast Galatians 5:16 περιπατέω (walk) and 5:25 στοιχέω (keep in step with)

⁸ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 274.

Walk—way of life, center of Paul’s ethical system (OT Deut 5:33; Ps 1:1; Is 30:21)

2:2 formerly **walked** according to

2:10 good works . . . **walk** in them.

Walk⇒ drives the ethical instruction of 4:1—5:21

1st of 5 sections that start with “**walk**” περιπατέω and οὖν

4:1 walk in a manner worthy of the calling

4:17 walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk

5:2 walk in love

5:8 walk as children of Light

5:15 walk, not as unwise men but as wise

of the calling with which you were called

Paul often uses “calling,” what is unique about this reference is that it not only includes those personal elements, Paul most often includes (election, adoption, union) but also corporate elements—calling into a new corporate body of believers.

4:2-3 provide the manner in which believers are to walk worthy—the quality of the lifestyle

2) **Walk in Love** 4:2

The next three key terms—part of two prepositional phrases—emphasize that to walk worthy of their calling, Christians must have humility, gentleness and patients. These words do not describe an “automatic response but one that demands conscious effort on the part of the believer who relies on the Spirit.”⁹

2 prepositional phrases

All humility

ταπεινοφροσύνη—a word that is used as a contrast to proud, self-seeking, selfish boasting.

Epictetus (AD 50-130), a Romans philosopher but it at the top of the list of qualities to **not** be commended.

In the context of Ephesians—with the emphasis on unity, requires humility, because “pride provokes disunity whereas humility engenders unity.”¹⁰

Gentleness

The opposite of roughness

Gentleness is not the same as weakness

Aristotle put gentleness or being gentle as the mean between “excessive anger against everyone and on all occasions” and “never being angry with anything.”¹¹

⁹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 508.

¹⁰ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 506.

¹¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 506.

The term is used of taming an animal or the control exercised by a master over an animal.

Patience

Longsuffering

Often used for believers, cautious endurance that does not abandon hope.

2 participial clauses

Bearing with one another

To endure with restraint, forbearance

“putting up with” or better “holding yourself back from one another”¹²

In love

ἀγάπη

A self-giving love, that seeks the highest good of another

Unconditional, not seeking response

Seeking God’s will in the one loved

The two participial clause support each other

“loving forbearance”

If you only put up with others without love—eventually you will become embittered, resentful and perhaps even angry.

Colossians 3:12–14 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (ESV)

3) Maintain Unity 4:3

Eager

To make hast, be diligent, to be zealous, to make every effort

Zealous effort

to maintain the unity of the Spirit

The unity is provided by Christ—it is something we have, now the challenge is to keep it.

Unity of the Spirit—is what Paul has described as positionally provided by union with Christ—created into one new entity.

Ephesians 2:22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (ESV)

in the bond of peace

ἐν instrumental

The unity of the Spirit is preserved through the bond of peace

Possible flow

Humility and Gentleness ⇔ enables

Patients ⇔ which is evidenced in

¹² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 509. Quoting A.T. Robertson.

Showing tolerance for one another ⇒ which is a concrete expression of
 “in love” ⇒ which is required to
 Being eager/diligent to maintain/preserve the unity of the Spirit

Staff Covenant

As a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, I will seek to honor Him in my role as a member of the **staff team** at Calvary Church. I view my personal success and the **success of building the Kingdom of God** in ministry as linked to the success of our **staff team**. I value and respect the people who form our **staff team**, believing that each has a unique contribution to make to the success of the **team**. This means I am committed to the following:

- When I have a problem with another staff **team** member, I will first go directly to that person, making every effort to seek understanding and resolution. I will not allow space for resentment to **grow**.
- When I’m not sure about another staff **team** member, I will give them the benefit of the doubt. **I will assume the best of others’ motives.**
- I will speak positively about my fellow staff **team** members; they are safe with me even in their absence.
- I will freely extend grace to other staff **team** members when I encounter their faults. I will pray for each member of our **staff team** regularly.
- I will support in public the decisions we have made inside our group.
- I will “speak the truth in love” with other staff **team** members, gracefully sharing with them information they may need to know in order to grow personally or serve more effectively. **I will use my words to encourage and not cause pain.**
- Confidences shared within our **staff team** will remain safely there—within the group.
- **I will work with diligence, as unto the Lord, with a servant attitude.**

Version: 12/21/00

b. Reason: Example of the Trinity as the basis for unity 4:4-6

7 Fundamental Theological Realities

The second part (vv. 4–6) consists of a sevenfold confession of the unifying realities of the faith, which provide a strong motivation for the appeal for unity. These verses are specifically linked with the first part through the language of calling (v. 1), though now the emphasis is on the one hope which springs from this call (v. 4b).¹³

The sevenfold use of “one” emphasizes the unity Paul has just challenged the Ephesians to maintain.

The apostle, however, is not speaking of a unity at any price in which the fundamental truths of the gospel are jettisoned. As a strong motivation for his appeal for unity he presents a series of seven acclamations, each using the word ‘one’, in which the readers are reminded of the fundamental unities on which the Christian faith and life are based. This theological undergirding begins without any linking conjunction or verb in v. 4 as the apostle moves from exhortation (vv. 1–3) to assertion. The motifs *one body* and *one Spirit* are declaratory, yet they have the force of an appeal.³⁷ The sevenfold list is basically threefold since three of these unities allude to the three persons of the Trinity, while the remaining four refer to believers’ relationship to the Spirit, Son, and Father.¹⁴

- 1) One body
Universal church
- 2) One Spirit

¹³ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 273-74.

³⁷ Cf. Schnackenburg, 160.

¹⁴ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 280.

3) One hope

Refers back to 4:1 “calling”

Emphasizes the sovereignty of God (see chapter 1)

Hope—an eager expectation of the outworking of God’s plan

God will deliver on His promises

In Ephesians this hope is particularly expressed in terms of God’s gracious purpose of summing up and bringing together all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth (1:9–10). As a foretaste of this grand hope the very existence of the church, a society of pardoned rebels, a multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body, is the means God uses to manifest his richly diverse wisdom to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realm. Thus, Paul reinforces his admonition by reminding his readers of the hope held out in their calling. A sense of expectancy, therefore, should motivate and unify their actions.¹⁵

4) One Lord

5) One faith

Question is whether is this objective faith (body of knowledge believed) or subjective faith (faith that is exercised by a believers toward their one Lord).

Most likely here, as is common in Paul and already used in Ephesians 1:13, 15—we are dealing with subjective faith.

Either way, the focus is on the one faith (personal or truth) that both Jews and Gentiles share.

6) One baptism

Water baptism (not Spirit baptism) is possible

So is the metaphorical baptism into Christ—death and resurrection

Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Significantly, baptism and unity are connected in Galatians 3:27, 28, as well as at 1 Corinthians 12:13. The apostle is not making distinctions as to whether it is water baptism or baptism in the Spirit that is in view. The one without the other was an anomaly. However, much of Paul’s teaching on baptism elsewhere in his epistles does not make sense unless the notion of spiritual union with Christ, at least, is in view (Rom. 6:3, 4; 1 Cor. 10:2; 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; though cf. 1 Cor. 1:13–17; 15:29).¹⁶

7) One God and Father of all

“all” –things or people

Hoehner, taking the TC sees it as all people

Other commentators take it more globally

Who is over all

Transcendent

Sovereignty

through all

Imminence—pervasive

¹⁵ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 282.

¹⁶ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 284.

Providence

God works through the lives of believers

and in all

Indwelling

1 Corinthians 8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (ESV)

See Colossians 1

An even greater basis for unity exists in God, the “Father of all” (v. 6). The theology is close to that in 3:14–15. Surely the Jewish *Shema*—the confession that Yahweh is one (Deut. 6:4)—lies behind this verse (cf. also Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6). The liturgical expression “who is over all and through all and in all” is paralleled in several texts, most notably 1 Corinthians 8:6 (though this text is different in that all things come through Christ). Variation occurs in the way liturgical expressions are applied.¹⁸¹⁷

Finally, Paul’s threefold acclamation reaches its climax as he praises the *one God and Father of all* for his universal rule and presence (v. 6). This acclamation, like that of 1 Corinthians 8:6 (itself a Christian reworking of the *Shema* of Deut. 6:4), characteristically acclaims the *one God* as *Father*, and then affirms⁴⁶ his supreme transcendence *over all* and pervasive imminence, *through all and in all*. But how is the term ‘all’ to be interpreted: as masculine, so referring to people, or as neuter, denoting ‘all things’, that is, the universe?⁴⁷

(1) Many interpreters regard the references to ‘all’ as masculine, thus denoting people, rather than neuter and signifying ‘all things’. This is normally taken to denote ‘all Christians’, which in the context of Ephesians signifies both Jews and Gentiles,⁴⁸ not ‘all people’ indiscriminately.⁴⁹ The grounds for this view are threefold: first, in the context of a series of acclamations where the unity of the church is in view, it is claimed that what might have been an original cosmological formula is here related to members of the church. Secondly, in Paul’s letters God is the ‘Father’ of Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3) and of those who are in him, that is, Christians (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:2). The exception in Ephesians 3:15, where the vision is broadened to include the whole of creation, does not apply here, it is argued, since the ‘[Father] of all’ is picked up in the expression ‘each one of us’ (v. 7), and this can only refer to members of the church. Finally, although some manuscripts read ‘in us all’ or ‘in you all’, the additional pronouns, which are generally conceded as a gloss,⁵⁰ are nevertheless thought to be correct and recognize that it was only among Christians that God was confidently known as Father. On this interpretation, the apostle is stating that God is transcendent over all his children, that they are the instruments or agents through whom he works, and that they constitute his dwelling place in the Spirit.

¹⁸ See also Romans 9:5; 11:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 12:6; 15:28; Colossians 1:16; 3:11. Romans 9:5 has the only other occurrence of “over all” in Paul’s letters, but whether he is referring to Christ or to God is debated.

¹⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996). 199.

⁴⁶ As in the case of 1 Cor. 8:6, the adjectival clause which follows, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν (‘who is over all and through all and in all’), amplifies the statement about God as Father.

⁴⁷ The expression ‘one God and Father of all’ (εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων) is related to ‘all’ in a threefold manner: he is ‘over all and through all and in all’ (ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν). If the ‘all’ (πάντων) in the expression ‘Father of all’ (πατὴρ πάντων) is taken as masculine, then the following three are also masculine; if, however, it is regarded as neuter, the following are understood as neuter.

⁴⁸ So Bruce, 337, who adds that the people of God are now ‘elect from every nation’.

⁴⁹ However, Bratcher and Nida, 96, 97, understand πάντων of ‘all people’, i.e., humanity as a whole.

⁵⁰ One variant reading (cf. D F G K L etc.) has ἡμῶν after πᾶσιν (‘all of us’), and this agrees with ἡμῶν (‘us’) in v. 7, while another reading (preserved in the Textus Receptus) has ὑμῶν (‘to you’) instead after πᾶσιν (‘all of you’). But the shorter reading which omits them both has the strongest textual support: P^{46} N A B C P 082 6, etc.

(2) However, a cosmic understanding of ‘all’⁵¹ makes good sense in this context. First, at significant points in Ephesians where the sovereignty of God and Christ are in view, ‘all’ denotes the whole universe (1:10, 11, 22, 23; 3:9; cf. 4:10). Secondly, in similar (confessional?) formulae within Paul’s letters (1 Cor. 8:6; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16) where different prepositions (e.g., ‘from’, ‘into’, ‘in’, ‘through’) are skilfully linked together in order to qualify God’s or Christ’s relationship to ‘all’, the word regularly signifies ‘everything’, not just persons or even believers. Thirdly, although there are formal affinities between Paul’s language and Stoic terminology, notably his use of ‘all’ and the play on prepositions by which the final unity of all that exists is expressed, the apostle’s ideas are very different from Stoic notions. They are, in fact, dependent on Old Testament statements about God, who fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24), whose glory fills both temple and land, and whose power given to the Messiah is exercised over the whole of creation, not just believers (cf. Pss. 2, 8).⁵²

The real difficulty with this line of interpretation is that the expression ‘the Father of all’ refers to God as the Father of all creation, whereas Paul usually speaks of him as the Father of Jesus Christ and of those who are in him. However, already in Ephesians 3:14–15 God is ‘the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name’. He is the Creator of all living things, so that their existence and significance depend on him. On this interpretation Paul is affirming that God is supremely transcendent ‘over everything’ and that his immanence is all-pervasive: he works ‘through all and in all’. If this latter understanding is correct, then God’s universal sovereignty and presence are set forth as the climactic ground for the unity of the Spirit that believers are to maintain. His universal rule is being exercised to fulfil his ultimate purpose of unifying all things in Christ. The unity of the church is the means by which the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed to the universe. The church is the eschatological outpost, the pilot project of God’s purposes, and his people are the expression of this unity that displays to the universe his final goal.¹⁸

Notice that it is not unity at any cost—it is unity within doctrinal soundness.

2. Enablement for unity 4:7-16

“But”

Diversity

The beginning of the second half of the section (vv. 7–16) is clearly marked by *but to each one of us* (v. 7), as Paul introduces the note of diversity. This diversity is not at variance with the overarching unity, nor is it at the cost of unity. The purpose of the ascended Christ’s giving various gifts to the church, particularly the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, is to build the whole body so as to enable it to attain maturity and unity (v. 13), a unity in which there is an integral role for the individual (v. 16). The various ministries are intended to equip the whole body for ‘ministry’, so that it might ‘grow up’ into a healthy (mature) body, with Christ at the head and the whole of it drawing its life from him as it grows into his likeness (vv. 12–16).¹⁹

Review and Application

So what?

⁵¹ With πᾶς being neuter and signifying ‘all things’.

e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

⁵² Barth, 471; cf. P. T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 47–48, 52.

¹⁸ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 284–86.

¹⁹ Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 273.

