

Ephesians 4:1-6 Answers Prescription for Unity

Overview:

The letter to the saints in Ephesus can be divided into two parts:

Chapters 1-3 are theology; chapters 4-6 are application. Thus Paul goes from principle to practical, from doctrine to duty, from belief to behavior. In particular, chapters 1-3 concern the Wealth of the Believer; chapters 4-6 concern the Walk of the Believer.

Introduction:

Joke on Unity: Two men are on a bridge; one is about to jump off and the other is trying to talk him down. The man asks the jumper, "So are you Christian, Hindu, Jewish or what?" The jumper replies, "Christian." The man says, "Small world, me too! Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox?" The jumper answers, "Protestant." The man replies, "Me too! What denomination?" The jumper says, "Baptist" The man replies, "Me too! Southern Baptist or Independent?" The jumper answers, "Southern Baptist." The man replies, "Me too! Conservative or moderate?" The jumper answers, "Conservative." The man replies, "Me too! Founder's Friendly or not?" The jumper answers, "Founder's Friendly." The man replies, "Me too! London Baptist Confession of 1644 or 1689? The jumper answers, "1644." The man replies, "Me too! First or second edition? The jumper answers, "First". The man then pushes the jumper off the bridge and shouts, "Die, heretic!"

Ephesians 4:1-6 is a prescription for the unity of the church. Paul urges unity based on the reality of there being one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God. This is a clear example of one's belief determining one's behavior. The unity application is drawn from the doctrine of there being one God.

This unity is not mechanical or externally imposed. (It is all too common to see uniformity without unity.) Rather it is organic; it comes from within and is supernaturally wrought by the Holy Spirit. And yet, maintaining this unity requires effort on our part and in this passage Paul gave us the maintenance schedule.

Today's passage marks the transition from doctrine to duty in the letter to the Ephesians. It is easy enough to erect various doctrinal positions, but we must also venture out of our fortifications into the world of life change and application. In this passage, quit preaching and went to meddlin'! Ephesians 4:1-6 is a tough passage of application for every Christian.

****** What reasons did Paul offer for us to maintain the unit the Spirit (4:1-6)?** Paul urged unity in light of the fact that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God.

1. One of the first words in this new section is "therefore" (4:1)? To what does "therefore" refer? See 2:11-3:11. It refers back to the truth that Jew and Gentile are now one in the kingdom, equal members of the household of God.

2. Why did Paul begin by reminding them that he was a “prisoner”(4:1)? See 3:1. Paul wrote this from prison (arguably in Rome). He was arrested specifically for preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles (the unbelieving Jews had brought charges against him). Paul paid a heavy price to the see Gentiles included in the church and this gave his words great weight.

Further, Paul’s imprisonment shows that obeying Christ can be quite costly. Doing what it takes to maintain the unity can be painful and means death to self. Notice that Paul saw himself not as a prisoner of Caesar, but of Christ.

— Walk Worthy —

What was the first thing Paul urged them to do (4:1)? Paul urged them to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they had been called.

3. What does it mean to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (4:1)? See 4:2-3. Allowing 4:2-3 to paint for us what that looks like, it means for believing Jew and believing Gentile to bear with one another in love humility and patience. It means being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Even though this was originally about believing Jew and believing Gentile getting along in the same congregation, but applies to us as surely with regard to how we interact with each other.

Every social group (even a gang) has rules of conformity, even gangs. If you want to stay in the group, you conform. Much more so God expects conformity within the church, not to outward rules, but from flowing out of a changed life. One important social “rule” is that of unity within the church.

ESV Philippians 1:27. . . let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel . . .

4. What is the calling to which we have been called (4:1)? See 1:3-14, 2:1-10. We have been called from being dead on our sins and made alive in Christ that we should be holy and blameless and adopted as His sons to the praise of His glory and there is awaiting us a heavenly inheritance.

— All Humility —

5. What would it look like for us to walk in all humility (4:2)? The KJV renders this as “lowliness”. It is to see yourself as little compared with the others in the church. That means that in our discussions and decisions, especially when there is disagreement, each of us is to see ourselves as less than the person we disagree with and thus offer him respect and patience accordingly.

Word Study: “Humility” (4:2) is from *tapeinophrosuné* (5012, ESV, p. 804), which seems to have been a word coined by Paul since the ancient Greeks had no use for humility, which they saw as a character flaw. It is a compound word that means to think low (MacArthur, p. 120).

Three essential qualities are necessary in for unity in the church. The first, as indicated here, is humility. The second is humility and the third is humility (Hendriksen, p. 183).

If you had a disagreement with your boss, how would the fact that he was your boss impact your words and attitude?

6. Why do you think Paul wrote the word “all” before humility (4:2)? It is all too easy to offend or be offended by what others in the church do or say. Successfully walking according to our calling will take *total* humility.

Are you easily offended? If you have all humility you won't be as quick to take offense or to let an offense burn you up. You won't as easily feel resentful.

ESV **James 4:6** . . . God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Why does God give grace to the humble? The reason God gives grace to the humble is because they will need. Expect people to walk all over you if you are humble. Try not to get your feelings hurt (their feelings sure won't be hurting them!).

There are always going to be people in the church who are insensitive, rude, obtuse, clueless, difficult, uncaring, overly particular, fussy, moody or self-centered. Sometimes people are in the flesh rather than walking in the Spirit. The question is, *How will you respond to this person?* Paul is here telling you what do to: you respond with all humility.

Ship Example: Scottish pastor Thomas Guthrie (1803-1873) wrote, “The very safety of eminent gifts and preeminent graces lies in their association with deep humility. Look at this might ship. With her towering masts and carrying a cloud of canvas, how she steadies herself on the waves and walks erect on the rolling waters like a thing of life . . . Why is she not flung on her beam's end, sent down floundering into the deep? Why, because, unseen, beneath the surface, a vast well-ballasted hull gives her balance and taking hold of the water, keeps her steady under a press of sail and on the bosom of a swelling sea. Even so, to preserve the saint upright, erect and safe from falling, God gives him balance and ballast, bestowing on the man to whom he has given lofty endowments the attendant grace of humility” (*Record of Christian Work*, Vol. 23, p. 729-730).

— Gentle —

7. What does it mean to be gentle (4:2) with each other? See *Proverbs 16:32*. It means we are mild in our dealings with each other. The opposite of this is to be harsh, domineering, over-bearing, opinionated and judgmental.

The Greek word for gentle was used of wild horses that had been broken and tamed. It carried the idea of strength under control. If you are angered over every nuisance or inconvenience you are not gentle.

ESV **Proverbs 16:32** Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

— Patience —

8. We are to walk worthy of our calling with patience (4:2). How would you define patience (4:2)? The KJV renders this “longsuffering”. The Greek is *makrothumia*, which literally means “long heat” (it takes you a long time to heat up, to get mad). It is the opposite of irritability and having a short temper. With respect to people who are very trying, we are to be long suffering.

This word (*makrothumia*) was used of the Roman army; it sometimes lost a battle but never the war. It was patient and unrelenting in their pursuit of the enemy. It also describes the disposition of a man who has the power to take revenge but does not (Dr. R. Henderson, MATBS class notes, 1983).

Example: Picture in your mind a mother dog putting up with her puppies. They crawl all over her, poop and pee in the den and have sharp little needle teeth that bite sensitive areas.

Here is the perspective you need to have: “In view of the fact that God has been so longsuffering toward me, even though in His eyes my sins must stand out far more clearly than do my brother’s blemishes in my eyes, I must surely be patient with my brother” (Hendriksen, p. 184).

— Bear With One Another —

9. Not only are we to walk worthy of our calling, but Paul also urged us to bear with one another in love (4:2). What does it mean to bear with one another (4:2)? To bear with someone means to put up with, to endure, to hear out, to listen to (BAGD, p. 63-64). Don’t quit and walk away.

This should tell us that dealing with other people church is sometimes an effort that requires endurance. It is not always easy. (*Hello! Is anybody home? Can you hear this? Do you have ears to hear?*). Having realistic expectations is very important. A relationship based church is much harder to be involved with than a program oriented church that is more formal and impersonal.

10. What is the difference between simply bearing with one another and bearing with one another in love (4:2)? See 1 Peter 4:8. Love (*agapé*) makes a world of difference in our attitude and approach. We can bear with someone grudgingly (“He’s my cross to bear”) or out of a heart of love (like a mother lovingly bearing with her infant’s demands).

ESV 1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

If you have love for the other person you will be humble and gentle and patient and your demeanor in bearing with him will be pleasant instead of troubled. You might well feel sorry for him, and pity him, but your love will overcome your disgust.

11. Why did Paul use the word *agapé* here (4:2) rather than *philé*? There are some people who are so offensive that you cannot love them naturally. It takes a godly type of love like *agapé*.

Reality Check. Verse 2 was written to the Ephesian church because it was needed. Strife and friction existed in the early church. Don't ever over spiritualize the early church. They had feet of clay even as we.

— **Maintain The Unity** —

What did Paul urge in 4:3? *See John 17:22-23.* Paul urged us to be *eager* to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

ESV **John 17:22-23** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one . . .

12. Why did Paul insert the word eager into this (4:3)? It must be easy to dread having to maintain the unity. We are to be eager to do what it takes to keep unified. We are to be quick to maintain the unity.

What does it mean to maintain a car?

13. How do we maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:3)? How to do this was explained in essence in 4:1-2. It takes humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love.

Context: Remember that the setting was the combination of Jewish believers and Gentile believers into one new body. The cultural differences were vast. They eat different food and followed different customs. The Jewish believers likely observed the Sabbath, followed kosher diets and circumcised their children. The Gentiles did none of that. They probably found each other offensive. Unity in such a context had to have been a challenge.

The unity of the Spirit is not automatic: it must be maintained! We have to consciously work at it. The church in Ephesus was made up from very diverse group of people, yet Paul told them to maintain what unity was already there.

14. Our unity is found “in the Spirit” (4:3). What role does the Spirit play in unity? *See 2:18, 22, Galatians 5:22-23.* We can't create unity (the Spirit does that), but we are to maintain it. Both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father through the one Holy Spirit. Also it is the same Spirit who dwells in each of us, whether Jew or Gentile, causing us to produce the fruit of the Spirit

ESV **Galatians 5:22-23** . . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . .

Our unity is in the bond of peace (4:3); is it possible to have unity without peace? If you took two alley cats, tied their tails together and throw them over a clothes line, they'd have union but not unity. There would not be peace!

15. In what sense is peace a bond (4:3)? Peace helps keep the unity.

ESV **Colossians 3:15** . . . let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . .

16. ** Based on 4:4-6, why should we be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit (4:3)?** Paul's reasoning seems to be that we should maintain unity since there is one body, Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God.

— **One Body** —

17. To what one body did Paul refer (4:4)? *See 1:23, 2:16, 3:6, 5:23, Colossians 3:15.* All believers, Jew and Gentile alike, now belong to one body ~ the church.

ESV **Ephesians 5:23** . . . Christ is the head of the church, his body . . .

ESV **Colossians 3:15** . . . you were called in one body.

Ecclesiology: There is only one church. **Joke:** The next time somebody asks you what church you belong to, say, "Is there more than one?" Of course there are local expressions of the one church (such as the church in Ephesus), but in we must ever keep in mind that there is, in the grand scheme of things, only one church. This truth transcends denominations. Our unity comes from the fact that there is but one church, one body of Christ.

NIV **1 Corinthians 10:17** Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

— **One Spirit** —

To what one Spirit did Paul refer (4:4)? The one Spirit is the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in us all.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:13** . . . in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

— **One Hope** —

18. It says that one hope belongs to our call. What one hope do we all share that belongs to our call (4:4)? *See 1:11-14, 18.* Biblical hope is a confident expectation. We have the confident expectation of the possession of a heavenly inheritance (eternal life, the redemption of our bodies, reward for our obedience to Christ, etc.). All Christians have the same hope; it is not different for each one or each ethnic group.

— **One Lord** —

Who is our one Lord (4:5)? *See 1:2, 3, 15, 17, 3:11.* The one Lord would be none other than the Lord Jesus.

ESV **Romans 10:9** . . . if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved . . .

This one Lord is the same Lord for the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, the Baptists and even people who meet in house churches.

— One Faith—

19. What is the one faith that we all have (4:5)? See 1:15, 2:8, Romans 10:9, Acts 4:12. It is saving faith, the Christian faith, faith in the sinless life of Jesus, His atoning death on the cross and the His bodily resurrection.

ESV **Acts 4:12** . . . there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other **name under heaven** given among men by which we must be saved.

Application: There is only one way of salvation: By grace through faith unto good works.

— One Baptism —

20. What one baptism is there (4:5)? See 1 Corinthians 12:13. This likely refers to the baptism of the Spirit (spiritual baptism) that each believer experiences at the moment of salvation or it may refer to the water baptism that each believer is to undergo upon his profession of faith.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:13** . . . in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . .

— One God —

How did Paul describe our one God (4:6)? He described Him as the Father who is over all, through all and in all (Jew and Gentile alike). This is called monotheism.

ESV **Deuteronomy 6:4** "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

What popular, made in America religion is polytheistic? The Mormons are polytheists. They hold that God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Ghost are three separate, distinct gods. One Mormon website states, "Mormons believe there are three Gods" (www.mormonchurch.com/668/are-mormons-polytheists; accessed 04/26/13).

What evidence for the Trinity is found in 4:4-6? We read of one Spirit, one Lord (Jesus) and one God the Father. Each Person of the Trinity is fully God, each is distinct from the other, yet there is only one God. He is a tri-unity (Father, Son and Spirit).

The Trinity is a mystery which cannot be comprehended by human reason but is understood only through faith. It is best confessed in the words of the Athanasian Creed. The creed is man-made and not inspired, but it express the Trinity in a way most Christians have agreed with for over a millennium. It states that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons or dividing the divine being. We are compelled by the Christian truth to declare that each distinct Person is God and that the deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, co-equal in majesty.

The creed continues, stating that the Father is God; the Son is God; the Spirit is God: And yet there are not three gods, but one God. We must worship the Trinity in unity and the One God in three persons.

The Father thought our salvation, the Son bought our salvation and the Spirit wrought our salvation (Hendriksen, p. 188).

21. Paul's appeal is for unity. How does the fact that God is over all and through all and in all provide a basis for unity (4:6)? God is not remote. He pervades all things, sustaining everything. The idea seems to be, *How can there be disunity when God is over (epi), thru (dia) and in (en) all?*

Transition: Next, in 4:7-16, Paul will explain how God equips this one unified body (through spiritual gifts).

So What?

22. What appeals did Paul make in this section? He urged the church members to exist together in unity and peace and to be mature in the Faith.

23. What examples on oneness did Paul give in 4:4-6?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher's note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Covering each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

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