

Oneness In Christ: Lesson 4

The Key To Unity

Memory Text: “Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” (Ephesians 1:9, 10)

Setting The Stage: Ephesus was the principal city in the Roman province of Asia. It wasn't the capital; Pergamum was. It had a fine harbor, and its location at the head of an important east-west highway helped it become a strong commercial center. Ephesus enjoyed wide respect also as a pagan religious center. Artemis, a many-breasted goddess of fertility also known as Diana, was worshipped there (Acts 19:35). Her magnificent temple was known to contemporaries as one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

Aquila and Priscilla, a dedicated lay couple, founded the Christian church in busy, pagan Ephesus. Apollos, an eloquent evangelist, also helped get it started. So did the apostle Paul (Acts 18:18-26). In fact, Paul spent three years in Ephesus. During two of those years he taught the Bible daily in a rented hall during the hot hours (11 AM to 4 PM) when city business slowed and the hall was otherwise unused (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31).

Because of the work of sharing Jesus with the people of Ephesus, many people stopped purchasing silver souvenirs of the goddess Diana. As a result the local silversmiths staged an anti-Christian riot (Acts 19:23-41).

Upon visiting the leaders of the Ephesus Christians some time later, Paul warned them that some of their own number would soon start teaching heresy (Acts 20:29, 30). In his letter to the church, he cautioned them, “Let no one deceive you with empty words.” (Eph. 5:6) But this wasn't the main theme of his letter to the Ephesians.

The main subject of Paul's letter was unity. He was writing to a church (or churches) consisting of Jews and Gentiles, individuals from Asia Minor and Europeans, slaves and freemen—all symbols of a disrupted world. Paul makes the case that unity in the church assures the ultimate unity of God's universe.

The case may be made that what the books of Galatians and Romans were to the 16th century Protestant Reformation, Ephesians is to the church today. What does Christianity have to say regarding the relation of the individual to the family, of the family to the nation, of the nation to the human race, and of all to the church and to God? Paul answers by presenting Christ as the center and end of all things, working

out His purposes through the church, gathering “together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Christ is the key to genuine unity.

Sunday – Blessing In Christ

Ephesians 1:3-14

Ephesians 1:3-14. According to these verses, what have we been given in Christ?

V. 3 “Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” God has given the follower of Jesus every spiritual benefit. He has poured out His favor from heaven through Christ on us.

1. Jesus chose us in Him to be holy, without blame before Him in love (v. 4).
The plan of salvation contemplates our complete recovery from sin. In Christ we are assured victory over sin and shame.
2. We have been adopted into Christ’s family and are accepted in the beloved (v. 5, 6). God loves us in the same way He loves His own Son.
3. In Jesus we have redemption and forgiveness (v. 7). There is no better experience than knowing that your sins have been forgiven and washed away.
4. Christ’s grace is given in order that we might not fail in behaving wisely (v. 8). As His children, there is no excuse for failing to live up to God’s expectations.
5. The plan of salvation has been made known to us (v. 9). Nothing has been hid from us. Everything we need to know about our condition and God’s plan to save us, He has revealed to us in Christ.
6. We have received an inheritance (v. 11). Eternal life with all its glory and beyond!

As the spokes of a wheel meet at the hub and are “in” the hub, and thus are drawn closer to together and operate in harmony with each other, so God’s children are “in Christ” being drawn closer together and working in unity/harmony with each other for the common cause of glorifying Christ. If we are not “in Christ” then the reality of unity becomes improbable.

Jesus prayed His children would be one even as He and His Father were one, and that could only occur if His children were being sanctified by the truth. No sanctification, no unity.

Ephesians 1:10: “That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

What does this verse reveal about God’s ultimate desire? Sports bars, social clubs, gangs, or social media can’t bring this unity about (Headline: “Turns Out Facebook Is Ruining Our Relationships As It Brings The World Together”). This can only be

accomplished through Christ. This verse is saying that God has revealed His plan for the management of the universe. It consists in bringing all things together in Christ.

Verses 4-6 have sometimes been used to support the doctrine that certain people are elected to be saved and others to be lost, and that nothing the individual can do will affect the result. It is true that it speaks about certain ones being chosen before the foundation of the world and being predestinated, or ordained to be adopted as children. But it says nothing about anyone being chosen to be lost.

Also, the chosen ones are designated “us,” meaning Christians, who by faith have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. Before the foundation of the world when the plan of salvation was laid, it was determined that those who accepted the provisions of the plan would be restored to son-ship. It has always been God’s desire that all would accept this plan and be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

Monday – Breaking Down The Wall

Ephesians 2:11-22

“Some of the deepest divisions among people are caused by differences of race, ethnicity, and religion. In many societies, identity cards indicate the ethnicity or religion one belongs to, and these distinctions often are connected with privileges or restrictions that people have to live with on a daily basis. When wars or conflicts arise, these markers of identity and differences often become catalysts for repression and violence.” (Adult Bible Study Guide, Oneness In Christ, p. 32)

In **Ephesians 2:11–22**, Paul indicates a better way for the Christian community. **How does our unity in Christ affect our differences? What was broken down by Jesus’ death on the cross?**

The covenant had originally been made with Abraham and His descendants. They were to make the covenant privileges available to the Gentiles and to invite them to participate to in the worship of the true God. They failed to carry out God’s plan, and the Gentiles remained “aliens” and “strangers.” Before Christ came, the knowledge of the “covenant of promise” was confined almost entirely to the Jews.

But in Christ and through His blood of Christ, Gentiles were to be brought near to the promise, with the middle wall of partition (imagery derived from the barrier in the Temple separating the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews, that had been erected by the Jews) being torn down by the Christ’s death on Calvary. The privileges of the gospel were now not merely for Jew alone, but also for the Gentile. No longer was there to be any difference or distinction made between the two.

While ethnic and cultural differences creates animosity and conflicts between people groups in today’s world, because Christian’s have a common Savior and Lord, these differences don’t (or aren’t suppose to) exist. If we are “in Christ” then we

don't first identify ourselves by our cultural background, or the color of our skin; instead we identify as being followers of Christ. I am a Christian man who happens to be white and from Australia. It is being "in Christ" that brings God's children together in harmony and unity.

That's why we all get along around here. We have a common Lord, common, message, and common mission. It doesn't matter what educational training we've had or haven't had, or what our political affiliations and preferences may or may not be, or what our heritage is or is not, or what our gender might be or not be (male or female), or what our social status is or is not in the world today. We are one in Christ Jesus. No one is better or worse. No one is more esteemed or less esteemed. No one is treated with more respect or less respect. The gospel levels the playing field in this sense. We are each an integral part in God's plan and purpose.

Ephesians 2:21, 22: "In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Tuesday – Unity In One Body

Ephesians 4:1-6

Ephesians 4:1-3. Genuine unity in the church comes about through the Spirit of truth, and this unity is to be a glimmer to the world of the unity that exists in the Godhead.

In Eph. 4:1 Paul says, "Act like a Christian, act like a believer." How does a believer act? "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." A Christian acts this way toward his fellow Christian, and does everything he can to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That's how a Christian is to act.

Notice the reason believers ought to maintain the unity of the Spirit. There must be unity because... **Eph. 4:4-6.** So because of all that inherent supernatural oneness that exists, the church then is to maintain its oneness as the outworking of its very calling. So we are called to unity, and our unity is brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is the most effective evangelistic tool we have in our arsenal? Is it our health message, our standards on dress, our choice of entertainment, or even our love for the world? Our greatest evangelistic tool is the unity we experience among ourselves.

If loving each other draws people to the church, then division will drive people away. That's why the devil works toward disunity. It will also drive them away

from Christ. If unity among us leads the world to believe that God sent Jesus into the world (according to the prayer of Jesus in John 17), then division among us leads the world to not believe.

“The strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form the church.” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 549)

And that the world will know that we are truly Christ’s disciples. *“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 279)*

When we’re divided, there is nothing we can say that the world will pay attention to. But when we’re united, then they will sit up and pay attention!

You would think that a 350-foot-tall tree would need deep roots, but that's not the case at all with the Sequoia. Redwood tree roots are very shallow, often only five or six feet deep. But they make up for it in width, sometimes extending up to 100 feet from the trunk. They thrive in thick groves, where the roots can intertwine and even fuse together. This gives them tremendous strength against the forces of nature. This way they can withstand high winds and raging floods. The strength of the church is in maintaining the unity of the Spirit.

Wednesday – Church Leaders & Unity

Ephesians 4:11-16

Ephesians 4:11-16. Why did God give these spiritual gifts? What was His purpose in giving special leadership gifts to the church?

All of these gifts were given the church:

1. For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry
2. For the edifying of the body of Christ
3. Till we all come into the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God
4. To grow up in Christ and reflect His character
5. To no longer be led astray by false teachings

Church leaders are needed to foster, promote, and encourage unity. There is a strong tendency in human beings to be independent and brush off accountability. Western society is plagued by this inclination. Paul reminds us, however, that no Christian is alone in this world and that we form a community of faith with spiritual leaders to help encourage one another in our common journey. We are, all together, part of the body of Christ.

Thursday – Human Relationships In Christ

Ephesians 5:15-21; 5:22-6:9

Ephesians 5:15-21. A person filled with the Spirit is a person in whom the following essential characteristics are seen: submission, humility, and subjection. Before God self is to be brought low. Often the demands we make of one another, even of our rights, are contrary to the spirit of loving ministry, which is the spirit of the gospel.

In addition to submission to superiors in age and authority, and respect for those we consider equals, there is a Christian submission due to those who we may be considered inferior in position. This submission reveals itself in consideration, charity, and respect for all of God’s children.

In this general statement, Paul has prepared the way for discussion in three areas where the spirit of submission is to find full expression if the relationship involved are to be conducted in a Christian fashion: relations of husbands to wives, of parents and children, and of masters and servants (think employer and employee).

Ephesians 5: 22-33. Can you imagine if unity were maintained in our families, what a powerful witness that would be in the world? That’s why the devil brings division in the home. Whenever I do marriage or family counseling, the biggest problems couples and families face is pride and selfishness. Somebody won’t apologize. Somebody has to have their way. It’s not often about the issues, but about a persons right to be right. And it’s often that way in the church. In most cases division exists because people are clinging tenaciously to their right to be right.

Ephesians 6:1-9. Christ-like respect in the home as well as in the church is required of husbands and wives and church members. This Christ-like attribute also is to be exemplified in relationships between children and parents and between employees and employers (bondservants and masters). The kind of harmony and peacefulness that should pervade our homes should pervade our church life, as well. No wonder Jesus prayed for unity. There is nothing better than that.

Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Further Thought

“The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God. No question of policy influenced His movements. He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the waters of life.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, pp. 190, 191)