1-13-19

Ephesians 4:4-6

In this chapter, Paul is writing to the church about Christian unity. We are asked to consider Who it is that we serve, the almighty God of the universe, and to act accordingly. We are called to live our lives in a manor worthy of being disciples of Jesus Christ. That means that it is important for us to consider sin to be as repulsive as God does, and to rely on His strength to avoid it; we are to be holy.

Part of this walk involves actively promoting the unity of the church, for it is the body of Christ. This in no way means unity at all costs. Unity must be maintained in accordance with the Bible; the word of God. Our unity is to be in Christ, that means that we cannot deviate from His teachings.

In walking with Christ, Paul here calls us to the character traits of humility and gentleness. We are to have patience with others in their struggles with life and coming closer to Jesus. And we are to be tolerant of others; again, this is a biblical tolerance. It is obvious that Christians hold different views on things that are not clearly spelled out in the Bible. For example, the timing, or even the existence, of the rapture; whether or not it is permissible to drink wine; the exact method of baptism. These are differences that can be discussed between Christians yet are to be tolerated between them.

Opinions or teachings that are contrary to orthodox Christianity are not to be tolerated. The reason is that these ideas are outside of Christ and therefore cannot be one with Him. We know that Jesus is coming back; that we are to celebrate the Lord’s supper; that we are to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is no compromise to the doctrine of the Trinity; to Jesus being 100% God and 100% man; that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Any deviation to these types of Christian teaching needs to be met with loving, but steadfast, correction.

Part of walking in a manor worthy of our calling (and God does call us) is to work to keep a unity in the church, which is itself unified by the Holy Spirit. And this is to be done as peacefully as possible. In this fallen world, peace isn’t always possible. But it is for us, as Christians, to work this way as much as possible.

Looking at our verses for today, there are several interesting things to note. Paul reinforces the idea of unity by the repeated use of the word “one”. It is used seven times in these three verses: One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Even though seven “ones” are listed, they are all bound together in unity. It all applies to the church, to the glory of God.

Notice that the Trinity is within this list. One Spirit is the Holy Spirit, one Lord is Jesus, and, of course, one God is God the Father. This shows again what we already know from our Christian teaching: that there is only one God. Here again, we see unity in the three persons of the Trinity being one God. The doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to Christianity; yet it is truly beyond our ability to grasp entirely. While perhaps confusing, the Trinity is a comfort to us. If we could fully understand Him, if He is on our level, then He is not much of a God. But He is beyond us and so we can trust Him when He speaks in His word and when He tells us that we are safely in His hands.

While we do our best to understand the Trinity, the best we can do is to describe it in our limited vocabulary and comprehension. Without reservation, there is one God, not three. Within that one God, we say that there are three persons. These persons are of the same essence, they are the same Being. They have one mind and are not in conflict with each other. The love between them is complete and perfect; still, they are one. God is not a single personality who at different times becomes whichever person is necessary. This is called modalism and is an heresy.

Each person of the Trinity has His part in creation and in our redemption and salvation. Each person loves us more than we could ever imagine. Three persons, one God; this is the Trinity. As I said earlier, all we can do is describe the Trinity as best we can; God is beyond our understanding. Yet we believe these things because the Bible teaches them and the Bible has proven itself true.

Paul begins verse 4 with “one body”. This is the body of Christ; the church. It is pretty obvious that none of us has two bodies and neither does Christ. We are talking spiritually here. The church is not a building but a group of people who are followers of Christ. All Christians who have ever been and who are now, are part of that spiritual body of Christ; the church. This body, this church, is in unity, it is one.

 This leads to a serious question: If the church is a unity, why are there thousands of different churches who have different points of view? Even among the Christian churches, we see disunity. The answer lies in looking through God’s eyes; form His point of view. When God looks upon a Christian, He looks upon them through His Son, Jesus. God sees Jesus’ righteousness in each Christian. He sees each Christian as justified; not guilty. He sees each Christian as being sanctified; being formed into the likeness of His Son. When God looks upon the earth, He sees each Christian in unity with each other, because we are all one in Christ. We are the one body, with Jesus as our one head.

One body is followed by one Spirit. This is the Holy Spirit. Just as each of us has a body and a spirit, so the body of the church has a Spirit. Having the same Spirit binds us all together in one body. As Paul talked about earlier in Ephesians, the church, the body of Christ, has been created so that the wisdom of God could be shown to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This body is living, and it is the Holy Spirit that gives life.

Remember in Genesis that God breathed life into the nostrils of the man and he became a living being. The Hebrew for breath is the same as spirit. Also, in Luke’s Gospel, Mary is told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive. The Holy Spirit created life within her; Jesus. Likewise, it is the Holy Spirit that is the spirit of the church, that gives it life.

Verse 4 finishes with one hope. We have talked before about hope. Gospel hope is not some wishful thinking that things might turn out well. We refer to our hope as a sure hope; it is as good as done. Of course, our hope is in Jesus Christ and the work He did on the cross. He took our sins upon Himself and paid the price in our place. When we accept Jesus and the gift He offers, we are made right with God. This is our hope, this is what we focus on, this is what we base our eternity on.

We might ask why hope is placed here in the verse of the Holy Spirit when our hope is in Jesus. It is because it is the Holy Spirit who calls us to Christ in the first place. It is He who gives us the faith we need to believe on Jesus and be saved. It is because of the Holy Spirit’s work, that we come to the salvation offered by Jesus. We owe all of our salvation to God; each person has His part to play in restoring us to fellowship. As Paul tells us, no one may boast regarding their salvation.

Verse 5 begins with “one Lord”. The Lord is Jesus. The term “lord” has been applied to someone with power and authority. It can be a person who has wealth and people who serve him. He is lord of his possessions and servants. The title “lord” can be applied to a judge or to a king. Considering these things, who is worthier to be called Lord than Jesus Christ. All things belong to Him; all of us who are citizens of His Kingdom are His servants. He will sit on His throne to judge all people and the angels, good and bad. He is King; He is King over a vast Kingdom and it will soon be a complete rule when He returns to the earth.

As Paul mentioned earlier in this letter, it is God’s plan to bring all things together in Jesus; and there is no doubt that His plan will be accomplished. Notice again the unity; God’s plan is to bring all things together. Also, there is only one Lord Jesus, He is not divided. This was important during the time Paul was writing because the Gentiles were coming out of a society that believed in many gods. It is important today because people still have their own gods, even if they don’t realize it. We need to be sure that there is only one Lord in our life; we cannot serve two masters.

There is one faith. The one faith is coupled with the one Lord and this is important. The faith we have must be in Jesus Christ in order to be saved; that is the way God has made for us to have salvation. To simply have faith in God the Father without depending on the work of the Son, will not save. The Bible makes it very clear, that Jesus is the only way to the Father; the only way to salvation. The beauty is, that if we have Jesus, we have the Father and the Holy Spirit too. This is the only faith that saves us, it is the only faith that justifies us; Christians are unified in one faith.

Next comes one baptism. We have to think about this one for a while. How can there be one baptism when different solidly Christian churches practice it differently? There are some who practice immersion and some who sprinkle. Others limit baptism to adults and others baptize infants. These are the modes of baptism, these are the ways Christians baptize and are baptized. But Paul is speaking of one baptism; he is speaking of baptism as a unity. Apparently, he is not speaking of the mode of baptism.

We need to look deeper into baptism, into what it is. One of the ordinances of Christ is to undergo the ritual of baptism. But keep in mind that the ritual of baptism is a representation of something. Certainly, it is a representation of cleansing; it is a representation of being united with Christ; it is a public statement of solidarity with Jesus. But let’s look at baptism itself.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about the Israelites following Moses and passing through the Red Sea. Paul tells us that by doing so, the Israelites were baptized into Moses. What does this mean? First off, a separation took place; the people of Israel were separated from Egypt, whom they had lived among and been part of for over 400 years. Secondly, they were attached to Moses. They came under his leadership and under his influence and under everything that he was associated with. By this, they were baptized into Moses.

And so it is with Christians. At the spiritual level, when we accept Jesus, we are separated from the world and we come under the leadership and influence of Jesus. The true baptism is a spiritual baptism into Christ. The ritual of baptism that we undergo is a representation of this spiritual baptism. This actual, spiritual baptism into Jesus is the one baptism that Paul is referring to. The ritual of baptism is not necessary for salvation, but the spiritual one is.

In saying these things, I don’t mean to downplay the importance of going through Christian baptism. It is very important; Jesus told us to do it. It is part of our personal confession that Jesus is Lord and that we associate ourselves with Him. It is a confession of our belief in Him to the Christian community and to the rest of the world.

Finally, in verse 6, Paul tells us that there is one God and Father of all. One God brings us back to the Trinity. Even though we speak of three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, there is but one God. We must be careful with the statement “Father of all”; we must be sure that we get Paul’s meaning. There is a sense in which God is the father of all things in that He created them; but that is not Paul’s meaning here. Remember that Paul is writing to the church, he is writing to Christians, and that is the focus of this letter. Specifically, at this point in the letter, he is talking about unity in the church.

So, here he means that God is the Father of all Christians. And He certainly is because when we accept Christ, our spirits are reborn of God. We are a new creation of His and He adopts us as His children. By this, we have unity in the church because there is only one God and all of us in the church have Him as our Father.

Paul finishes this verse by saying that God is “over all and through all and in all”. He is still speaking of God the Father, and all still refers to the church. God is over the church; He created it, He rules it, and He sustains it. Were it not for God, the church would not exist.

God is through the church. God has chosen to do much of His work through people; people who have accepted Jesus as Saviour. God works through the church. It is through the actions of Christians that God has chosen to get things done.

God is in all His people; He is in His church. A reminder of why we ought to walk worthy of our calling. As the Holy Spirit is in us and as Christ is in us, so is the Father. We have become a temple for God now, even while we are being fitted together as a spiritual temple in heaven. This is a lot that we are called to; praise God that He only expects us to do it through His strength.

Prayer

Glory to You O LORD, for Your plan will come to pass; all things will be brought together in Your Son, Jesus Christ. We are eternally grateful to You for the gift of faith, that we are happy to be brought together in Jesus; You have saved us from the judgement of rejecting Him.

Keep us always steadfast in Your truth, never giving way to compromise; yet give us loving, humble hearts, that we may lead those who stray back to You.

You are one God, the God of Israel, the God of the universe. We worship You, thank You, and offer You praise.

All in Jesus’ name

Amen