

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON THIRTY-NINE)**

### **“THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT” (PART TWO)**

#### **EPHESIANS 4:1-6**

*1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

*3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;*

*5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

*6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

In **Ephesians** chapter **4** and verses **1-3**, the Apostle Paul makes the following appeal to the believers in Ephesus:

*1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

*3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

In previous **Lessons**, we said that in these first 3 verses of chapter **4**, Paul emphasizes **The Grace of Unity**. In verse **1**, he begs the believers to “*walk worthy*” of the high calling with which they were called. In verse **2**, he tells them **how** they are to walk worthy of their calling. “*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*” In verse **3**, he tells them **why** they are to walk worthy with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. He says, “*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”

The keeping or preservation or maintaining of the unity of the faith is an extremely critical component of the Christian experience and witness. That is why in almost all his letters, Paul consistently urged believers to live in unity. The following passages of Scripture bear this out:

### **Romans 14:19**

*“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”*

### **1 Corinthians 1:10**

*“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”*

### **2 Corinthians 13:11**

*“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”*

### **Philippians 2:1-4 (New English Translation)**

*1 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort provided by love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any affection or mercy,*

*2 complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose.*

*3 Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat one another as more important than yourself.*

*4 Each of you should be concerned not only about your own interests, but about the interests of others as well.*

### **Colossians 3:12-15**

*12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

*13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

*14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*

*15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*

We observed that in verses **11-13** of the same chapter, Paul speaks of “*the unity of the faith.*” He writes,

*11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;*

*12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

*13 Till we all come in **the unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

In this passage, Paul explains that Jesus Christ has given to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting or equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry and for the

edifying or building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the “*unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*”

We noted that in verse **3**, Paul urges the believers to “*keep the unity of the Spirit,*” while in verse **13**, he desires for them to “*come in the unity of the faith.*” In verse **3** unity is a reality to be **maintained**. In verse **13** it is a goal to be **attained**. We made the point that Paul is not speaking about two different types of Christian unity. Rather, he is informing the believers that there is a sense in which Christian unity has already been accomplished and yet there is also a sense in which it has not yet been accomplished.

In His work of atonement and reconciliation, Christ has already made us one. It is our responsibility to **keep** or **maintain** the unity that He accomplished at Calvary. But in another sense the unity that He purchased and guaranteed with His blood must now be lived out and brought to full expression in the life of the Church. In this sense it is a goal that the members of the Body of Christ must strive to **attain**.

We noted that **John Piper**, the founder and lead teacher of **desiringGod.org** and chancellor of **Bethlehem College & Seminary**, summarizes Christian, unity in the light of **Ephesians chapters 2–4**, as having **common convictions** about Christ, **common confidence** in Christ, and **common care** for each other. It is these three components of Christian unity that Paul refers to as the “*unity of the Spirit*” in **Ephesians 4:3**.

Our common **convictions**, **confidence** and **care** are all generated by the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that Paul refers to the unity that he wants the believers to preserve, as the “*unity of the Spirit.*”

Paul’s focus in verses **2** and **3** is not so much on how to maintain our **common convictions** or our **common confidence**. His focus is on how a group of imperfect persons can preserve a **common care** for each other. How can flawed individuals maintain the “*unity of the Spirit*” with each other? How can a group of persons who have come from

contrasting backgrounds; who have encountered contrasting experiences, and who possess contrasting personalities reflecting contrasting likes and dislikes, live in harmony instead of becoming hostile and bitter? How is the “*unity of the Spirit*” to be maintained? Paul gives us the answer in verse 2: “*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*”

We have said that none of these graces is natural to our human nature, but are all the result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

It is very important for us to bear in mind that Paul’s plea for unity in chapter 4, must be considered in the context of his prayer in verses 16-19 of chapter 3. In this prayer, he makes four requests of God on behalf of the believers.

The four requests are for **strength, stability, apprehension, and fullness**. They are not to be considered as four isolated petitions, but as four parts of a whole, which directly relate to each other. One request leads into the next one, and so on. He prays that their “*inner man*” might receive spiritual strength, which will, in turn, lead to a deeper experience with Christ. This deeper experience with Christ will enable them to “*comprehend*” God’s great love for them, which will result in their being “*filled with all the fullness of God.*”

Our receiving of **strength, stability, apprehension, and fullness** is determined by the degree to which we surrender to the Holy Spirit. The more we yield ourselves to Him, the more He is able to strengthen us with might in the inner man; the more we are strengthened with might in the inner man, the more comfortable the Lord Jesus Christ will feel in our hearts; the more comfortable the Lord Jesus Christ feels in our hearts, the more we will be rooted and grounded in His love; the more we are rooted and grounded in His love, the more we will lay hold on the greatness of the love of God for us; the more we lay hold on the greatness of God’s love for us, the more we will be filled with all the fulness of God.

Thus, the secret of our being strengthened with might in the inner man, having Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith, being rooted and grounded in love, laying hold on the greatness of the love of God for us, and being filled with all His fulness, is found in surrender to the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, in light of this, I would like to encourage every person who worships at **The Grace Workshop Ministries**, to make it a matter of priority to earnestly pray that God Almighty would fast track the dismantling of our self-lives, so that we will begin the process of deliberately, intentionally and consistently yielding to the promptings of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit.

In verse **3** Paul writes, “*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” The word “*endeavouring*” is the translation of the Greek word **Spoudazó: (spoo-dad’-zo)**, which means “to hasten, to exert oneself, to give diligence to.” The word conveys the idea of hastening to do something with the implication of associated energy or with intense effort and motivation. This verb has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis attached to it. It suggests zealous concentration and diligent effort. It also suggests difficulty and a resolute determination to overcome the difficulty. Paul is desirous that the believers in Ephesus understand and appreciate that the preserving of the unity of the faith will not occur if they operate on auto pilot.

Brothers and sisters, preserving the unity of the faith is something that requires considerable effort on our part. Someone once made the following poetic remark in respect of this matter:

“To dwell above with saints we love,  
O that will be glory  
But to dwell below with saints we know,  
  
Well, that’s another story.”

The word **spoudazo** speaks of intensity of purpose followed by intensity of effort toward the realization of that purpose. It speaks of careful and

continuous attention. In other words, **spoudazo** does not only affect a person's state of mind; it affects his or her activity also. Paul is saying in effect to the believers in Ephesus, "I want you to give maximum commitment, spare no effort, be eager, give all diligence, work tirelessly to keep the unity of the Spirit."

The word is in the present tense in Greek implying that the believers are to keep on making every effort, eagerly seeking to preserve a **common care** for each other.

Brothers and sisters, as with every other spiritual grace, this "endeavouring" can only be accomplished by a daily surrendering of self and a continuous and whole-hearted dependence on the Holy Spirit to enable us! Maintaining the unity of the faith or demonstrating a **common care** for each other is going to mean that we must consistently work hard at it. It is critical for us to understand this basic principle, because our natural tendency is to disunity. The word "endeavouring" is in a construction in the Greek which indicates that this action of endeavouring is a choice which all believers must make in their own heart to strive to manifest the graces of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and forbearance.

In **Philippians 2:12-13**, Paul speaks of the cooperation that must exist between the believer and the Holy Spirit, in order for he or she to consistently manifest the spiritual graces which are necessary for the preservation of unity. He writes, "*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*"

In these verses, the Apostle urges the Philippian believers to make the humility and self-surrender exhibited by the Lord Jesus in His incarnation, a fact in their own lives. In verse **12** he exhorts them to work out their own salvation. Of course, Paul does not mean that they were to work for their salvation. This is so for two reasons. Firstly, he was writing to persons who were already saved, and secondly, salvation

is not a work of man for God, but a work of God for man. It is God's sovereign work of love and grace, accomplished by our Lord on the Cross.

The words "*work out*" are the translation of a Greek word which means "to carry to its ultimate conclusion." We say for example, that a student worked out a math problem. What we mean is that he or she carried the problem to its ultimate conclusion. This is the way it is used here. The Philippian believers are exhorted to carry their salvation to its ultimate conclusion, which is Christlikeness. The salvation spoken of here is not justification, but sanctification, victory over sin and the living of a life pleasing to the Lord Jesus. They are to see to it that they make progress in their Christian lives. They are to do this with "*fear and trembling.*" This is not the fear and terror that a slave exhibits in the presence of a cruel, abusive master, but a wholesome awe and reverence. In this verse, Paul emphasizes **human responsibility**.

In verse **13** he emphasizes **divine enablement**. He says "*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*" The believers are to carry their salvation which God has given them to its ultimate goal, always remembering and depending upon the fact that it is God who is working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The word "*worketh*" is the translation of a Greek word which means "to energize, to work effectively."

The words "*to will*" are the translation of a Greek word meaning "to desire." They refer to a desire that comes from one's **emotions** rather than from one's **reason**. It is this desire to do the good pleasure of God that is produced by divine energy in the heart of the believer as he or she definitely subjects himself or herself to the Holy Spirit's ministry. It is the Holy Spirit who energizes the believer, making him or her not only willing, but actively desirous of doing God's will. But the Holy Spirit does not merely leave the believer with the desire to do God's will. He provides the necessary power to do it. This we have in the words "*to do.*" The construction in the Greek implies habit. As the believer yields



to the influences and urgings of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit supplies him or her with both the desire and the energy or power to habitually do the will of God.

Paul says, “*Endeavouring to **keep** the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” The word “*keep*” is the translation of the Greek word **téreo**: (**tay-reh’-o**), which means “to keep an eye on, to keep something in view, to attend carefully, to watch over.” The word speaks of watching over something which is in one’s possession. It speaks to the guarding of something that one considers to be precious. In using the present tense Paul is urging the believers in Ephesus to continually guard, or preserve or maintain the unity of the Spirit.

Why do believers need to keep the unity of the Spirit? The answer is that the unity of the Spirit is very precious, and if it is not kept, if it is not guarded, if it is not maintained, it will gradually disappear and be replaced by division, antagonism and dissension.

What is it that Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to keep or maintain? It is the “*unity of the Spirit.*” The Greek word translated “*unity*” is **henotes**: (**hen-ot-ace**). It is one of the important words in the **Acts of the Apostles**. The word describes a state of oneness or of being in harmony and accord. **Henotes** does not describe an **external**, ecclesiastical unity, but an **internal**, spiritual unity. The Holy Spirit has already created a basic unity as a result of Christ’s work of atonement and reconciliation, that nothing can destroy. But it is our responsibility to preserve this unity and actively and consistently experience and enjoy it. And so, Paul pleads with the believers in Ephesus, and the Holy Spirit pleads with us, to burn with zeal to guard the unity which Christ purchased on the Cross of Calvary and to live in peace with one another.

Brothers and sisters, if we are serious about being Christians and if we are serious about making **The Grace Workshop Ministries** an outpost of heaven, then we must understand that it is imperative that we Endeavour to “*keep the unity of the Spirit.*”

Jesus command His disciples to demonstrate the sweet aroma of oneness. In **John 13:34-35**, he said, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” And in **John 17:20-23** as He prayed to His heavenly Father He said,

*20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;*

*21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

*22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*

*23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

Now here in **Ephesians 4**, Paul is saying that God has answered the prayer of His Son in **John 17**, and has created a Body, characterized by oneness, in the sense of a positional truth which is unchangeable. Now enabled by the Holy Spirit, the members of that Body are to be diligent to produce the experiential fruit of that oneness so that unsaved men and women may be led to glorify God. May God grant that it might be so among us at **The Grace Workshop Ministries!**

Brothers and sisters, the Church has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of His goodness and the prime example of what the reconciled universe of the future will look like. It is our privilege and responsibility to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep this unity must involve some visible representation. If the “*unity of the Spirit*” is real, then the members of the Body of Christ must ensure

that the reality of the unity is **visibly** evident. We must ask ourselves, “Is the unity of the Spirit visibly evident among us?”

If we live in a manner which damages the unity of the Spirit, we are negating the gracious reconciling work of Christ. We are saying in effect that His sacrificial death by which He healed our relationship with God and with each other, is of no real consequence to us at all!

Many of us have had the experience of meeting someone for the very first time and sensing in our spirit that he or she was a Christian. This is because all true believers share a fundamental unity in the core of our beings. This is the greatest, most profound, most satisfying unity that it is possible to have in this world.

This does not mean that we all see everything eye to eye. It is wrong to suppose, as some persons do, that when believers dwell together in unity they will all read the same translation of the Bible, like the same genre of Christian music, wear the same clothes, style their hair in the same manner, send their children to the same schools, share the same convictions, have the same likes and dislikes, and more or less operate like Christian clones. The reality is, that when we insist that others look and operate exactly like us, we are exhibiting a mind-set that makes genuine unity impossible. This is so because such a mind-set inevitably produces an inflexible judgmental attitude that promotes comparisons, criticism and condemnation.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ honours and values our individuality and commands that we live in unity at the same time. Every member of His Body must do the same. We must not attempt to make each other over in our image!

The truth is that if we cannot experience unity in diversity, there is no possibility of us ever experiencing it, for all of us differ in many ways.

The unity that Paul speaks about in **Ephesians 4**, cannot be legislated or produced by the mechanics of an organization. It is produced and maintained by the Holy Spirit.

**Ruth Paxson**, the noted Bible teacher, missionary, and author made the following remarks concerning Christian unity:

“If someone asked what is the first essential of the Christian’s walk, it would seem most fitting to say it was holiness. Did God not choose us in Christ that we should be holy? Then is not holiness the fundamental essential in the Body of Christ? The divine order in Ephesians is otherwise, and God’s order can never be reversed.

**Ephesians 4:2-16** shows that the first characteristic of a worthy walk is unity. What is the primary necessity for wholeness and health in a human body? It is the harmonious functioning of all the organs of the body; the perfect co-ordination in action of every part with every other part. A displacement of even an insignificant organ or the maladjustment of any parts of the body can cause disease and disability.... So in the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, spiritual health is dependent upon the harmonious functioning of all the members and upon their perfect co-ordination in action. But what awful maladjustments we see in Christ’s Body to-day! What sinful failure in co-ordination between its members! What shameful divisions over secondary matters which dishonor the Lord in the sight of the world! How desperately we need to come back to the divine standard set in **Ephesians**, and how humbly we need to acknowledge our failure and sin in not living according to it!”

Brothers and sisters, we must be willing to acknowledge our own failure to keep the unity of the Spirit. We must repent and commit ourselves to the task of breaking down every barrier that would prevent us from living in unity with the other members of the Body of Christ.

**John Fawcett** was a British Baptist theologian, pastor and hymn writer. In 1765, he became the pastor of **Wainsgate Baptist Church** in West Yorkshire, England. He served for 7 years, despite a small income and a

growing family. In 1772, he received a call to pastor the large and influential **Carter's Lane Baptist Church** in London. He accepted the call and preached his farewell sermon at **Wainsgate**.

The wagons transporting himself and his family to London were loaded with his books and furniture, and all was ready for their departure, when his parishioners gathered around him, and with tears in their eyes begged him to stay. His wife said, "Oh John, John, I cannot bear this." "Neither can I," he exclaimed, "and we will not go. Unload the wagons and put everything as it was before." His decision was hailed with great joy by his people, and he wrote the words of the following hymn in commemoration of the event:

*"Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.*

*Before our Father's throne  
We pour our ardent prayers;  
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one  
Our comforts and our cares.*

*We share each other's woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.*

*When we asunder part,  
It gives us inward pain;  
But we shall still be joined in heart,  
And hope to meet again."*

In our next **Lesson**, we will continue our examination of the "unity of the faith."