

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

(LESSON FORTY-FIVE)

“ONE GOD AND FATHER”

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 verse 3 of our text, Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus exhorting them to endeavor “*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” The “*unity of the Spirit*” does not describe an external, physical, man-made union, but an internal, spiritual unity that is produced by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who baptizes, or places, or positions every saved person into the Body. It is of this unity that Paul speaks of in chapter 2, verses 14-22:

14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility,

15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace,

16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,

18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household,

20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

(New English Translation)

The Holy Spirit has already created a basic unity in the Body as a result of Christ's work of atonement and reconciliation. This is a unity that nothing can destroy. It is **not** our responsibility to **create** unity, but it is our responsibility to **keep**, or **maintain**, or **preserve** the unity that has been created by the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Spirit must be lived out and brought to full expression in the life of the Church. The members of the Body of Christ should be actively and consistently experiencing and enjoying the "unity of the Spirit."

It is important for us to ever be mindful that the Church - the Body of Christ, has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of His grace and the example of what the reconciled universe of the future will look like. Believers are, therefore, expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep, or preserve, or maintain this unity means that it must be **visibly** evident to all who carefully observe us. If there is a genuine unity of the Spirit among us, it will manifest itself transparently. We have a responsibility before God to ensure that this is so, and we have the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to help us.

When we live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit, we are damaging the gracious, reconciling work of Christ, and we are grieving the Holy Spirit. Such behavior is tantamount to us saying that the sacrificial death of Christ, by which the relationship between God and sinful humanity has been restored, is of no real consequence to us!

In verses **4-6**, Paul lists **7 basic spiritual realities**, or **7 elements of oneness** that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. These are **One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God**. The ground or basis of the Church's unity arises from the fact that there is one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. All these elements of oneness should have the effect of persuading believers to make every effort to keep, or preserve, or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Whenever we are tempted to speak or act in a manner that may injure the unity of the Spirit, we need to remember these 7 unifying truths.

We have looked at 6 of these unifying truths in previous **Lessons**. In this **Lesson**, we will consider the truth that there is **One God**.

In **Ephesians 4:6**, Paul writes, "*One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*" Paul states unequivocally that there is "*one God and Father of all.*"

Brothers and sisters, God has a family which persons become members of by exercising faith in Jesus Christ. God shows no partiality in His family, for He is the Father of all, both Jew and Greek, black and white, rich and poor, male and female. The acknowledgement of this truth should motivate every member of the Body of Christ, to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

Because there is only one God who is Father, there is only one Christian family. As the English theologian **John Stott** noted, “You can no more multiply churches than you can multiply gods. Is there only one God? Then, He has only one church. Is the unity of God inviolable? Then, so is the unity of the church. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead.” **Because we serve one God, our worship and service should be characterized by oneness of spirit.**

The church is one because it has one God and Father of all; one glorious Being to whom it sustains the relationship of both creature and child. This God is not merely above us all, but He is through us all and in us all. He penetrates us all and fills us all with His sustaining and life-giving presence. It is important for us to understand that Paul’s repetition of the word “*all*” is a reference to all believers, not to all human beings. There is one God and Father. The unity of the church is founded on this doctrine. The Church is united because it is owned and possessed by one God. The Church is animated by the very life of God. This life is not the natural life which belongs to every human being, but it is spiritual life, it is eternal life.

Regarding entrance into the Father’s family, the Apostle John says the following in **John 1:10-13**:

10 He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him.

12 But to all who have received him — those who believe in his name — he has given the right to become God’s children

13 — children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband’s decision, but by God.

(New English Translation)

The supreme tragedy and utter irony of the scenario described in this passage is that Jesus Christ came into the world that He had created and lived among the human beings that he had created, and these human beings were blind to His identity as the true Light! The world was in darkness and did not know the light but instead rejected the light. This is phenomenal! The Creator came to His own planet, His own creation, His own historical land Israel, His own chosen people, the Jews, and they could not and would not recognize and acknowledge Him because of their spiritual blindness!

Brothers and sisters, if your eyes have been opened to spiritual truth, if you have recognized and acknowledged Jesus Christ as your Lord and saviour, if He is your Lord and your God, then pause for a moment and thank God that His Spirit awakened your soul and wrought a spiritual circumcision of your hardened, blind, corrupt heart, inherited from Adam, for you could never have otherwise recognized and acknowledged Him.

John confirms this in verses **12** and **13**. He writes, “*But to all who have received him — those who believe in his name — he has given the right to become God’s children — children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband’s decision, but by God*” (**New English Translation**).

John informs us here that in order to become the children of God, we had to be given the right to do so. This is exactly what God did for us, without any help from us. He says, “*children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband’s decision, but by God.*”

We are born of God by a free act of sovereign grace. He chose us before we choose him. Indeed, He chose us **in order** that we might choose Him. We chose Him by believing in His name. But when we chose Him by believing in His name, we still were not qualified to take our place in the house and family of God. Spiritual life was indeed present within us, but so was a whole history of sin! How, then, were we able to become the children of God? God not only provided the regenerating power by which we were born again, but He also provided the authorization by which we could lay claim to our inheritance as children, even though we were sinners. That is precisely where Jesus comes in. The moment we believed in Jesus, the moment we received Him for who He really is, in that moment He gave us the right and authority, as sinners, to lay claim to our inheritance as legal children of God, because we were “*born by God.*”

It was Jesus Christ who gave us the right to become the children of God. The word “*given*” is the translation of the Greek word **Didómi**: (**did’-o-mee**), which speaks of an act which is based on the decision of the giver, without any merit on the part of the recipient. The clear implication in this passage is that salvation is a sovereign work of God who gives believing sinners the right to become His children. It is a gift of God’s sovereign grace. As Paul explains in **Ephesians 2:8-10**,

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.

(New English Translation)

John informs us that Jesus Christ gave us the “*right to become God’s children.*” The word “*become*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “to come into existence, to cause to become or come into being.” It signifies a change of condition, state or place. This Greek word is the root of the verb which means “to beget, to give birth, to produce offspring.”

In this context it refers to a historical time in the past, the moment of our new birth when God, our Father, gave us the privilege to be part of His family.

There is a common misconception that every human being is a child of God, but that belief is not in keeping with what Scripture teaches. The fact is that only those who believe in Jesus Christ have the right to become God’s children and to call Him “Father.” It is only they who can legitimately pray, “*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name*” (**Matthew 6:9**). There are two families on earth — the family of God or the family of the devil — and every human being belongs to one of them.

In **John 8:44**, our Lord said to certain of the Jews, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*”

In **1 John 3:7-10**, John makes it very clear that the **one God** is not the **Father** of unbelievers:

7 Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as Jesus is righteous.

8 The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil.

9 Everyone who has been fathered by God does not practice sin, because God's seed resides in him, and thus he is not able to sin, because he has been fathered by God.

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: Everyone who does not practice righteousness — the one who does not love his fellow Christian — is not of God.

(New English Translation)

It is important for us to understand that John is not here speaking of **perfection**. Rather, he is speaking of **direction**. If God is indeed our Father, then, our direction will be heavenward. If we are children of the devil, then, our direction will be hell-ward. In other words, our general **behaviour** reveals our eternal **destiny**. While it is true that our behaviour does not save us, it does serve to demonstrate that we are truly saved.

The fact that those who believe in Jesus Christ “*become God's children*” means that all people are not God's children by natural birth. To become God's child requires a new birth — a spiritual birth.

Brothers and sisters, from time to time we should recall what we were **before** the one God became our Father and made us His legitimate children! In **Ephesians 2:1-3** and **11-12**, Paul gives us a graphic description of what we were:

1 And although you were dead in your offenses and sins,

2 in which you formerly lived according to this world's present path, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience,

3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest...

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh — who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands —

12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (New English Translation)

Have we lost the sense of awe that is proper for us in respect of the one God and Father of all who saved us from eternal death and made us members of His own family? If so we need to ask God to remind us of how it used to be.

*Nothing good have I done to deserve God's own son.
I'm not worthy of the scars in His hands.
Yet He chose the road to Calv'ry to die in my stead.
Why He loved me I can't understand.*

*Roll back the curtain of memory now and then.
Show me where You brought me from and where I could have been.
Remember I'm human and humans forget.
So remind me, remind dear Lord.*

Paul tells us that the one God who is Father, is “**above all.**” God the Father is the Supreme, Sovereign of the universe. To use a theological term, God is transcendent. He is not dependent on anything or anyone. Indeed, everything and everyone is dependent on Him! And this supreme, sovereign, transcendent God who is over all His children, working after the good pleasure and counsel of His own will to carry out His eternal purpose in Christ for the Church.

Paul tells us that the one God who is Father, is “*through all.*” The word “*through*” is a translation of the Greek word **dia**. The word has several meanings but in this context it is a reference to the instrumentality or the circumstance whereby something is accomplished. In other words, the sovereign, omnipotent God is able to use every circumstance and situation to accomplish His intended purposes. As Paul wrote earlier in chapter 1, verse 11, “*In Christ we too have been claimed as God’s own possession, since we were predestined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will*” (**New English Translation**).

God is in this universe in which we live and He is moving it according to His plan and purpose, and this assures us as His children that our individual lives have meaning, purpose and security. This is what Paul highlights in **Romans 8:28, 31** and **35-39**:

28 And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

31 What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

36 As it is written, “For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(New English Translation)

Paul tells us that the one God who is Father, is **“In you all.”** In the context of the entire letter and the emphasis in this section on the unity of the church, the phrase *“in you all,”* refers to the fact that God indwells all believers, and by virtue of His in-dwelling of all, He is able to influence all and motivate them to live in harmony.

God is **in all**, filling them with the light and love of His gracious presence. The idea conveyed by the phrases, “above all” and “through all,” is more external and general in nature. The idea expressed in the phrase *“in you all,”* is more intimate and speaks to a special union and intimacy.

The marvelous oneness of believers in the family of God is evident here, for God is above all, working through all, and in all. We are children in the same family, loving and serving the same Father, so we ought to be able to walk together in unity. Just as in an earthly family, the various members have to give and take in order to keep a loving unity in the home, so the members of God’s spiritual family must do the same. Let us remember that the “Lord’s Prayer” begins, not with **“My Father,”** but with **“Our Father.”**

Brothers and sisters, because there is one God and every genuine believer is a worshipper of this one God, there should be unity in the Body of Christ. People who have different objects of supreme affection cannot be expected to have unity. People who worship gods of their own making, cannot hope to be united. Their affections are directed to different objects, and there is no harmony. But where there is one supreme object of affection that is acknowledged by all, there may be expected to be unity.

The children of a family that are devoted to a parent, will be united among themselves; and the fact that all Christians have the same God and Father should cause them to have a strong bond of union among themselves. Would to God that it might be so among the members of **The Grace Workshop Ministries!**