

GOD

Keeping the Unity of the Spirit so we can have Peace (Ephesians 4:3)

As members of the Body of Christ, God wants us to have peace. This peace is not “world peace”, which we know from God’s Word is not available because the adversary runs the world’s affairs and will continue to do so until the Return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Instead, God wants us, His children, to have peace in our lives, no matter what is going on around us. Not only does God want us individually to have this peace, but He desires that we, as members of the Household, live in peace with one another, living together in harmony with one accord.

How can we get this peace? We’ll focus on the first three verses in Ephesians, Chapter 4, but before we do, let’s consider the context in which they are set.

The first three chapters of Ephesians present doctrine: how to believe rightly. We learn, among other things, the truths of the Great Mystery, that no matter what our previous background, when we confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we were saved, becoming members of God’s family, part of the Body of Christ. We find that collectively we believers make up the Temple, God’s dwelling place. We are admonished to build up our spirit by speaking in tongues much so that Christ may dwell in, or saturate, our hearts to the end that we can fully comprehend the greatness of God’s love for us, allowing us to be filled with all the fullness of God. We also learn that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.

Chapter 4 of Ephesians then begins the practical part of this epistle: now that we have the doctrine, how do we apply it in our lives? How do we show it in our “walk”, allowing us to not only experience the more than abundant life for ourselves individually but also collectively as members of the household of God?

The first three verses of Chapter 4 set the stage for this practical part of Ephesians:

Ephesians

- 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of (*in*) the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are (*were*) called,
4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love
4:3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

From verse 1 we see that because of our collective calling to be God’s habitation, our walk, our life, should be balanced (that’s the true meaning of the word “worthy” here) between doctrine (how to believe rightly) and practice (our application of this right believing in our daily lives). Verse 2 tells us that we do this by “forbearing one another in love”. We build each other up, or brace each other up like the supports for a wall in a building, so that we all can stand. And we do this as we renew our minds and manifest the love of God. This is to be done with lowliness, or humbleness of mind, meekness, whereby we read and hear God’s Word and act accordingly, and patience.

As we do this, verse 3 says that we are “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” We want to take a closer look at this verse to see how it applies to us.

First, what do we mean by “peace”? This word is translated from the Greek word *eirene*: the name “Irene” literally means “Peace”. Peace can be defined as a state of well-being or wholeness, a state of rest. Bullinger’s *Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* defines peace as “a state of health or well-being, denoting a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being”. According to verse 3, it is available for us to experience this peace, no matter what the circumstances around us may be.

There’s a figure of speech in verse 3 that will help us to understand how we can achieve this peace. In the phrase “in the bond of peace” the word “of” represents the figure of speech called the “genitive of origin”. Peace is produced by, or originates from, the bond that is the result of us keeping the “unity of the spirit”. This verse could be read: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond which produces peace.” Remember, God wants us to have peace in our lives as we live in peace with one another, and this verse will tell us how to get this peace.

What do we mean by “bond” in verse 3? The word “bond” is translated from the Greek word *sundesmos*, which is a medical word that refers to the ligaments that hold parts of the physical body together. It can also be thought of as a rope tied around a bundle of sticks, holding them together. As we stand together, bound together like a rope around sticks by our keeping the unity of the spirit, we will have peace.

Now comes an important question: What is the unity of the spirit, and what does it mean where it says that we are to endeavor to keep this unity of the spirit so we can be bound together and have peace?

The word “spirit” in verse 3 is not referring to the gift of holy spirit that we received when we got born again, and it’s not referring to God Himself, who is Holy and who is Spirit. Instead, here it could be better understood as “spiritual” so we could read this verse as “Endeavoring to keep the spiritual unity”. It’s another genitive figure of speech: by saying “unity of the spirit” the word “spirit” is emphasized: you could read it: spiritual unity. Just like the phrase “the Word of God” for God’s Word, with emphasis on God.

The word “unity” can be found in only three places in the entire Bible, two in the Book of Ephesians and the third in the Psalms of the Old Testament. We’ll take a look at these usages to better understand what this spiritual unity is about.

In the New Testament, the word translated “unity” is the Greek word *henotēs*, which means “unanimity”, “oneness”, or “agreement”. We already read one of the two usages of this word, in Ephesians 4:3, where it is used in the context of spiritual unity. The only other usage of this Greek word, also translated “unity”, is in Ephesians Chapter 4, verse 13, in the context of the purpose of the five ministries that God made available to build up the body of believers in the Church:

Ephesians

4:13 Till (*until*) we all come in (*to*) the unity of the faith (*family faith*), and of the knowledge (*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a perfect (*mature*) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The ministries will be around to build up the believers until the Return of Christ, and it is then that we will all come into “the unity of the family faith.”

The single occurrence of the word “unity” in the Old Testament is in Psalm 133:

Psalms

133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Interestingly, in this verse there is no corresponding Hebrew word in the texts that was translated “unity” – and there is also no corresponding Greek word in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. If you look up the word “unity” in a Concordance, you will see this verse listed, and the word given is the Hebrew word *yachad*. This word, however, corresponds to the word “together” in Psalm 133:1. Indeed, *yachad* is translated “together” in numerous other places in the Old Testament, but it is also translated as “united” and “joined”. In Psalm 133:1 the word “unity” is implied from the context of believers dwelling together. With this in mind, this verse has implications for us today: it is good and pleasant for us to dwell together in unity.

We’ve seen that spiritual unity is needed for us to have that bond which produces peace. In the verses following verse 3 of Ephesians, Chapter 4 we see that this spiritual unity is a product of eight distinct, unique things, each of which we must recognize in order to benefit from this unity:

Ephesians

- 4:4 *There is* one body, and one spirit, even as ye are (*became*) called in one hope of your calling,
4:5 One Lord (*Jesus Christ*), one faith (*the faith of Jesus Christ*), one baptism,
4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Notice the repeated use of the word “one” in these verses, stressing oneness, or unity. We have a figure of speech in this repetition, with each attribute emphasized. Also, the number eight spiritually means “new beginning”, like the peace we get from this spiritual unity.

This spiritual unity, which gives us the bond which keeps us members of God’s household standing together so we can have peace, is not something that we can put together ourselves: it’s already there. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 3 is not telling us to endeavor to make the unity of the spirit. You can’t take all the different denominations out there and unite them together, even though some have tried to do this in the past (and have not succeeded). The unity is already available as we recognize the eight essential ingredients listed in those following verses. Instead of trying to “make” the spiritual unity, we are simply exhorted to keep it.

The word “keep” in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word *tēreō*, which means “to watch over” or “to observe attentively”. It could also be thought of as “to keep like a treasure”, by keeping an eye on something so it does not become lost.

This word *tēreō*, translated “keep”, is often used in the context of keeping, or observing, the commandments of God. It’s also found in many places in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. Let’s look at two of these Old Testament uses of this word for better understanding:

Proverbs

4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

In other words, pay attention to the thoughts of your heart, the seat of your personal life.

Proverbs

3:1 My son, forget not my law (*God’s Word*); but let thine heart keep my commandments:

3:2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

In these verses we see that if we want peace in our lives we need to keep, to pay attention to, God’s Word.

Ephesians

4:3 Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

We’ve seen that in order to have this peace that God wants us to have we need to keep the spiritual unity. We need to take action on our part. This is stressed by the first word in the verse, which is “endeavoring”.

The word “endeavoring” in verse 3 is translated from the Greek word *spoudazō*. This is the same word that in II Timothy 2:15 is translated “study”:

II Timothy

2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

If you were to look up the other usages of this word *spoudazō* in the Bible, you would find that its basic meaning is to expend a diligent effort, or to make an earnest attempt to achieve or accomplish a goal.

So, according to Ephesians 4:3, if we want this peace in our lives, we need to expend a diligent effort to keep, or watch attentively, the spiritual unity. It takes work to do this. As mentioned in verses 1 and 2, we need to keep our walk balanced between doctrine and practice, with humbleness of mind, meekness, and patience building up and supporting each other so we have that bond that keeps us together so we have peace.

It's in the book of Ephesians, the greatest revelation ever given to the Church of Grace to which we belong, that we find how to have peace, both in our own personal lives and especially with each other in God's household. These same great truths are reiterated in Paul's epistle to the Colossians, which was written as correction to those who had failed to practice the doctrine set forth in Ephesians and had reached the point that they had doctrinal errors creep in.

Let's conclude by looking at Colossians, chapter 3, where we'll see these truths established:

Colossians

- 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering:
- 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.
- 3:14 And above all these things put on charity (*manifest the love of God*), which is the bond of perfectness (*the bond that keeps us together in the household*).
- 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

Notice how these verses in Colossians reiterate what we learned in Ephesians: as we forbear, or support, each other with humbleness of mind, meekness, and patience, acting with the love of God, we are bonded together. Then, we can let the peace of God rule (or, umpire) in our hearts. That's something to be thankful for.

As we keep our walk balanced between doctrine and practice, building each other up as we renew our minds and manifest the love of God, we exert a diligent effort to keep, to attentively watch, that spiritual unity that God has made available, bonding us members God's household together. Then we will truly experience the great peace that God wants us to have.

- Dr. Rick Batt