

7. The Unity of God's Eternal Purpose—Ephesians 4:1-16

God's eternal purpose was in Christ (Eph 1:1-10) and in the church (Eph 1:11-23), all of which was according to God's eternal plan as stated in Eph 1:11b-12.

Eph 2:1-10 teaches that both Gentiles and Jews are saved "by grace through faith." Man must ". . . do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10)." Therefore, God reconciles people unto himself in Christ and in the church, according to Eph 2:15-16.

Previous lessons have taught that the one body is the one church (Eph 1:22-23). In Eph 2:19-22, the descriptive terms for the church broadened:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but **fellow citizens** with **God's people** and members of **God's household**, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the **whole building** is joined together and rises to become a **holy temple** in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling** in which God lives by his Spirit. [Emphasis Added]

According to Eph 3:10-11, the church is to make known God's revelation:

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 3: 21 ends that chapter with God receiving all glory in Christ and the church: "21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." The church of Christ is, therefore, distinctive, unique, and separate from all denominations and sectarian groups. Simply put, it is the church about which Christ said, "I will build my church (Matt 16:18).

Ephesians 4 secures the unity of God's eternal purpose revealed in his plan of salvation for all ages—a plan that is unchanging and certain for all people for all time.

The Unity of the Spirit through the Bond of Peace

Eph 4: 1-3

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

The Christian life is a calling from God. The Hebrew writer says that it is a heavenly calling in Heb 3:1: "1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." Paul emphasizes that the calling is God's calling in 2 Thess 1:11: ". . . we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, . . ." However we, ourselves, must eagerly make our calling sure: "10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. (2 Peter 1:10)."

The characteristics of this *calling* are just the opposite to the characteristics of our former manner of living (Eph 2:1ff): Christians are to be completely humble and gentle, patient, and loving. These characteristics lead to the *unity of the spirit* and *the bond of peace*. Jesus himself prayed for this unity and peace in the lives of believers in John 17:22b-23:

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Of course, the one church, the one body, must be peaceful and unified, and not divided by denominationalism and sectarianism. Paul sets the stage for the seven unities for all to follow.

Eph 4:4-6

4 There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

1. One Body

The first unity is the unity of the body. Christ said that he would build his church in Matt 16:18: “. . . on this rock I will build my church. . .” The one church that Christ built is the body of Christ in Eph 1:22-23: “22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” The one baptism and the one Spirit—two of the seven unities converge in the creation of the one body in 1 Cor 12:13: “3 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

2. One Spirit

The unity of the faith includes the aforementioned one Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God. This is the same Spirit that God has given to each obedient believer to insure their salvation. Eph 1:13-14 teaches explicitly:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

The Holy Spirit dwells in us through the word of God—the sword of the Spirit, which is the instrument through which God speaks and works, according to Eph 6:17-18: “17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Heb 4:12 teaches that the power of this sword is without limit:

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Indwelling through the word of God, the Spirit of God speaks to us, assuring us that we are children of God. Rom 8:13-14; 16-17 explains:

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. . . . 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

3. One Hope

The text above relates the oneness of the one body, the church, and the one Spirit to the one hope by asserting, “Just as you were called to one hope when you were called.” The power of Paul's argument is gaining momentum! One body, one Spirit, and now, one hope reveal unity as the eternal characteristic of God's eternal purpose. Paul again demonstrates the interconnectedness of the seven unities. Of the Spirit and hope, he said in Rom 8:23-24a:

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved.

This hope of adoption and redemption saves us and anchors our soul. Heb 6:19 teaches, "19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

4. One Lord

There is one Lord, Jesus Christ, the true savior and son of God. John teaches that it has been that way from the beginning in John 1:1-5:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

This Christ came to live among men and die for men. John adds in John 1:14

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This Lord, who is the *One and Only*, garnered this same indisputable recognition from the Hebrew writer in Heb 1:1-3:

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

In Paul's companion letter to Ephesians, Colossians, he summarized the nature of Christ as the one Lord in whom the fullness of God dwells. This summary in Col 1:15-20 forever precludes any other as Lord:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Yet there were and are false Christs that seek to deceive mankind. Jesus warned of this in Matt 24:4-6: "4 Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.'" He warned again in Matt 24:23-25:

23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time.

5. One Faith

Without one faith, there can be no "unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." The faith as used here is the revealed system of all that God has given in us to believe. Paul described this system of faith in Eph 3:2-4:

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written

briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ . . .

It is the one faith to which all men must become obedient in order to be saved. Paul recorded in Acts 6:7, how people became disciples by obeying the faith: "7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." In Acts 14:22, it was the faith to which they remained true: "22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith."

According to Jude 3, it was the faith once for all entrusted to the saints: "3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

6. One Baptism

The one baptism must be the one in Acts 22:16 that washes away sin: "16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." This same baptism, baptizes us into the body, the church, in 1 Cor 12:13: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." This one baptism allows us to reach the blood of Jesus in his death in Rom 6:3: "3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" When we are baptized with this one baptism, we put on Christ: "27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal 3:27-28)." Indeed, this one baptism saves us. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21: "21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God."

7. One God and Father of All

The One and Only God is "over all and through all and in all." For us, Paul explained in 1 Cor 8:5-6, there is only one God:

For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

The key to Christian unity is in the phrase, repeated here, "for whom we live." This commitment to living for God through Jesus is bedrock of all the other six elements of unity. God was, is, and always will be central. In the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:7-9), God stated the eternal principal of His unifying force:

7 "You shall have no other gods before me.

8 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 9 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God . . .

The Unity in the Faith and in Knowledge

Eph 4:7-10

7 *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says:*

*"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men."*

9 *(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)*

God uses the gifts and talents of the church and its members to secure the unity of the faith.

Eph 4:11-13

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Specifically, the gifts came in the form of the men who received them. The first two such gifted groups were apostles and prophets, who were inspired to write scripture. Paul described how God's revelation came through the apostles and prophets in Eph 3:5: "5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets." The evangelists, pastors, and teachers, while not inspired as the apostles and prophets to write scriptures, were unique in their qualification to build and protect the church, using the scripture. Paul described the work of an evangelist in 2 Tim 4:2-3; 5:

2 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. . . . 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Pastors, who were called elders and overseers, were more specifically charge to feed and protect the congregation in which they served. Two scriptures bring these terms together, painting a clear picture of what pastors are to do. In Acts 20:17, Luke accounts how Paul summoned the elders of Ephesus: "17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church." When Paul spoke to these elders in Acts 20:27-28, he called them overseers and shepherds:

27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

In 1 Peter 5:1-2, Peter also uses the three terms to describe the pastor's work:

5 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers.

The present day practice of calling preachers pastors is clearly erroneous and unscriptural.

This passage ends in verse 13 with a reference to its beginning: "13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

The Unity of the Truth in Love

Eph 4:14-16

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

With these offices apportioned in the church, the church grew beyond infancy, being able to expose crafty men and their false doctrine. In contrast, the church could speak the truth in love, grow up in all things in Christ, and support and build itself up in love, with every member working and having a part.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Eph 1:1-10: What role did Christ play in God's eternal purpose?
2. Eph 1:11b-12: What role did the church play in God's eternal purpose?
3. Eph 2:1-10: What two groups did God save? By what and through what are they saved?
4. Eph 2:10: What works must man do?
5. Eph 2:15-16: In what were men reconciled to God?
6. Eph 1:22-23; Eph 2:19-22: What are different names for the church?
7. Eph 3:10-11: Through what was the manifold wisdom of God to be made known?
8. Eph 3: 21: In whom and in what is God to receive the glory?
9. Eph 4: 1-3: How are Christians to live? How are they to act? What are they to keep?
10. Heb 3:1: What kind of calling do we share?
11. 2 Thess 1:11: Of what are we to be worthy?
12. 2 Peter 1:10: Of what are we to make sure?
13. John 17:22b-23: For what did Jesus pray?
14. Eph 4:4-6: What are the seven unities?
15. Eph 1:22-23: What is the one body?
16. 1 Cor 12:13: How does one get into the one body?
17. Eph 1:13-14: What does the one Spirit do for us?
18. Eph 6:17-18: What is the sword of the Spirit?
19. Heb 4:12: How powerful is the word of God?
20. Rom 8:13-14; 16-17: What does the Spirit tell our spirit?
21. Rom 8:23-24a: In what are we saved?
22. Heb 6:19: What is the anchor for our soul?
23. John 1:1-5: From where did the one Lord come?
24. John 1:14: What form did the Word take?
25. Heb 1:1-3: Through whom does God speak?
26. Col 1:15-20: What is the nature of Christ?
27. Matt 24:4-6: Who will try to deceive us?
28. Matt 24:23-25: What are we not to believe?
29. Eph 3:2-4: From whom do we receive God's revelation?
30. Acts 6:7: How are disciples made?
31. Acts 14:22: To what must we be trust?
32. Jude 3: For what are we to contend?
33. Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27-28; 1 Peter 3:21: What does the one baptism do?
34. 1 Cor 8:5-6: How many God's are there? What comes from Him? For whom do we live?
34. Deut 5:7-9: What does God teach about idols in any form?
35. Eph 4:7-10: What did Christ apportion?
36. Eph 4:11-13: What did Christ give in the church? Why?
37. Eph 3:5: What do apostles and prophets do?
38. 2 Tim 4:2-3; 5: What do evangelists do?
39. Acts 20:17; Acts 20:27-28; 1 Peter 5:1-2: What three terms are used for pastors?
40. Eph 4:14-16: Describe the full-grown church.