

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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TRUE CHURCH UNITY

The late Jim Boice made this observation: “There are some Christians who are primarily intellectual in nature. They love books, enjoy study and delight in the exposition of the Bible’s great doctrinal passages. This is a good thing. It is proper to love doctrine and rejoice at what God has done for us in Christ. Paul himself obviously did this; we can tell from the way he has unfolded his doctrines in the first three chapters of this letter. But the intellectual believer faces a great danger and often has a great weakness as a result of failing to overcome the danger. He loves doctrine so much that he stops with doctrine. He reads the first three chapters of Ephesians and delights in them; but when he comes to chapter 4 he says, “Oh, the rest is just application. I know all about that.” Then he skips ahead to the next doctrinal section and neglects what he perhaps most needs to assimilate. On the other hand, some Christians are primarily oriented to experience. They thrive under the teaching found in the second half of this book. They want to know about spiritual gifts and their own exercise of them. They are excited about Paul’s teaching about the family and other such things. This is “where it’s at” for them; they find the doctrinal section dry and impractical. But, you see, each of these is an error. Doctrine without practice leads to bitter orthodoxy; it gives correctness of thought without the practical vitality of the life of Christ. Practice without doctrine leads to aberrations; it gives intensity of feeling, but it is feeling apt to go off in any (and often a wrong) direction. What we need is both, as Paul’s letters and the whole of Scripture teach us. We can never attach too much importance to doctrine, for it is out of the doctrines of God, man, and salvation that the direction and impetus for the living of the Christian life spring. At the same time, we can never attach too much importance to practice, for it is the result of doctrine and proof of its divine nature.”¹ The Bible was not written so that we might simply feed our spiritual feelings. This is an error we are all too prone to make. We often seem to think (and this is taught by many) that “spiritual” means “emotional,” and that unless we “feel” or experience some emotion when we read the Bible or hear it taught, we are unspiritual. On the other hand, we are not creatures of mere cold intellect (like the Spock character in “Star Trek”). Our minds are the means by which we understand, but unless the truth apprehended by the mind affects our lives, then we have not “grasped” the truth or doctrine we claim to understand. We have merely gone through a dry and lifeless academic exercise, which is no better than the mindless sort of Christianity which approaches the Bible seeking only some psychological high. The Apostle Paul has been unfolding and displaying in chs. 1-3 of the Epistle the glorious truths of the believer’s blessings in Christ. He has, as it were, laid the doctrinal foundation for the ‘practical’ construction of chs. 4-6. This is not to say that the Apostle is through with doctrine. On the contrary, he is never ‘through’ with doctrine! He is, however, at a major point of transition, as indicated by the word THEREFORE (4:1). He is now making an application or connection between doctrine and duty. It is very important to realize this connection, for apart from it, the following exhortations are groundless. There can be no duty without doctrine, no Christian life that is not grounded in theology. Unless there are theological roots, there cannot be the fruit tree of Christian living. “Christian life must correspond with Christian faith.”²

I. THE ENTREATOR (v. 1)

The Apostle again describes himself, “as a prisoner of the Lord” (comp. 3:1). Paul is not trying to excite pity or sympathy, but is in effect adding force to the exhortation. “His writing to them while he was in chains proved the deep interest he took in them and in their spiritual welfare – showed them that his faith in Jesus, and his love to His cause, were not shaken by persecution that the iron which lay upon his limbs had not entered into his soul, and that his apostolical prerogative was as in tact, his pastoral anxiety as powerful, and his relation to the Lord as close and tender as when on his visit to them he disputed in the school of Tyrannus or uttered his solemn and pathetic valediction to their elders at Miletus.”³

II. THE ENTREATY (vv. 1-3)

“I urge *PARAKALO*, to beseech, to exhort, to encourage. “Either sense would suit here, but ‘exhort’ seems weak for the connection; comp. Rom.12:1, where it is followed by ‘the mercies of God,’ a strong form of appeal. More than exhortation is implied, especially as it is an absolute duty to which he calls them.” (T.K. Abbott) Grammatically this word occurs first in the sentence.

A. THE DUTY: “To live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” What does “worthy” mean? *AXIOS* lit. that which balances the scales, equivalent; that which is appropriate or reasonable. “Paul uses the expression only by way of admonition (I Th. 2:12; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; Eph. 4:1; cf. also 3 John 6), and therein links the motive and goal of all Christian action. Its motivating power lies only in the preceding action of God, which alone determines its content and thus distinguishes it from all legalism. Hence the warning not to receive the Lord’s Supper *TOU KURIOU ANAXIOS* (I Cor. 11:27) does not denote moral quality but an attitude determined by the Gospel.” (Theol. Dict. N.T.) The word trans. “live” (NIV) is *PERIPATEO*, to walk about, to conduct one’s life (cf 2:2, 10). The point Paul is making is based upon the “call” which the believer has received; *KLESIS* to summons, cf. 1:18. This “call” is not to be construed as an “invitation”. It is the calling that precedes justification (cf. Rom. 8:30, comp. also I Thess. 4:7; I Pet. 2:21).

B. THE DESCRIPTION: The Apostle now describes some of the characteristics of the “worthy walk”.

1. “Completely humble” – *PASES TAPEINOPHROSUNES*, lit. all low-thinking. The word refers to the quality of esteeming ourselves as small but at the same time recognizing the power and ability of God. “The test of our true apprehension of the Gospel is our sense of the majesty of God.”⁴ cf. Acts 20:19, where Paul uses this word of himself.
2. “Gentle” – *PRAUTES*, meek, gentle. The word expresses an attitude that is free from malice and revenge or vindictiveness. It has the idea of cheerfulness of disposition, gentleness and friendliness as well as kindness and generosity (cf. I Pet. 3:4).
3. “To be patient” – *MAKROTHUMIA*, the words stands for that calmness and equanimity of mind in the presence of exasperating people (cf. I Cor. 13:4). “It is that patient self-possession which enables a man to bear with those who oppose him, or who in any way do him injustice.”⁵
4. “Bearing with one another in love” – *ANECHOMENOI*, to bear with, to hold one’s self up. The word indicates to have patience and endurance with people until the provocation is ended. This is to be done “in love. J.A. Robinson remarks, “Here, as so often in this epistle, love is introduced as the climax, the comprehensive virtue of the new life which includes all the rest.”⁶ (cf. 1:4, 3:17, 4:15, 16 and esp. Col 3:12 ff)

C. THE DESIGN – The Christian worthy walk is to be characterized by these things, in order to promote the spiritual zeal for unity and peace. To this end Paul urges them to “make every effort” – *SPOUDAZONTES*, lit. to give diligence, to be eager, to make every effort. The word implies strain as if there would be opposition. The point is this will take effort. “To

keep – *TEREIN*, to guard, to keep, to maintain, to preserve. The idea is maintaining that which already exists. “The unity of the Spirit” – that is the unity which is made or provided by the Holy Spirit (comp. 4:13) “through the bond of peace” – *SUNDESMOS*, lit. that which binds together, a bond. The word denotes the substance which adheres. Peace is the bond in which unity is maintained (comp. Col. 3:14).

III. THE EXAMPLE (vv. 4-6)

There are seven unities listed by Paul in these verses: One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, on baptism, one God and Father of all. These seven unities fall under three groups:

A. ONE BODY - unity is underscored by the concept of “Body” with all that is involved in its growth and perfection, one Spirit and one hope.

B. ONE HEAD – and that which unites believers to Him, one faith, one baptism.

C. ONE GOD – who is over all (comp. Rom. 11:36; I Cor. 3:23).

Observe also in the unfolding of these verses the order; first the Church, then Christ, then the Father.

Note also the three Persons of the Trinity – Spirit, Lord (Christ), Father.

NOTE: Some have tried to argue the “Fatherhood of God” from this text, but this ignores the context entirely. “The emphasis here as in 1:3, 17; 2:18; 3:14, 15 is on redemptive Fatherhood. The first person of the divine Trinity is our Father in Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: Paul’s argument in these verses is simple. Everything regarding the Christian faith encompasses unity. It is true of the Body of Christ, the Church; it is true of the Head of the Body, Jesus Christ; and it is true of the Triune God. Believers are therefore urged to live the “worthy” or “balanced” life. In doing so, unity in practice will be seen. But notice this ‘practical’ admonition is built upon “theology” and is even illustrated by theology. In the words of one old Divine, “Let every believer, then, study diligently to be more distinct, particular, and express in his exercise of faith. Let him endeavor daily to be more and more express, especially, in his trusting in Christ for salvation from the love, power, and practice of every sin. This appropriating and express exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus is graciously and absolutely promised.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ J.M. Boice *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1997) p. 121

² B. F. Westcott, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (rpt. Eerdmans, 1962) p. 192

³ J. Eadie, *Commentary of Ephesians* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1979) p. 211.

⁴ Westcott, op. cit., p. 193.

⁵ Eadie op. cit., p. 212

⁶ J. A. Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians: Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979) p. 92.

⁷ John Colquhoun, *Spiritual Comfort* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1998) p. 294.