

Ephesians 4:1-6

“The Body of Messiah”

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Messiah’s gift.*”

Whereas Ephesians chs. 1-3 have been primarily doctrinal, chs. 4-6 apply the teachings that Paul has previously laid out in a practical way, perhaps paralleling Romans chs. 12-13 and Colossians chs. 2-3.⁵³ Ephesians ch. 4 begins to address the realities of the Messiah’s people in the world. Paul explains to his audience how they are to walk or “live” (NIV) appropriately as Believers. But even though the remaining sections of his letter will deal more with application than with doctrine, Wood is keen to state, “Theology is not left behind but interwoven with the moral exhortations.”⁵⁴ It is very easy for one to overlook the fact that although Ephesians chs. 1-3 are very theological, chs. 4-6 are actually longer.⁵⁵

In Ephesians 3:1 Paul has said that he was a prisoner “on behalf of you Gentiles” (RSV), but later in Ephesians 4:1 he is “the prisoner of the Lord.” Bruce describes that “being ‘in the Lord’ currently involves his being a prisoner; what should being ‘in the Lord’ involve for them?”⁵⁶ Whatever Paul’s audience may do because of being in the Lord, he says, “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (NIV), as imploring an audience to do something is not an uncommon practice as seen from previous epistles (i.e., 1 Thessalonians 4:1; Romans 12:1). God has called the Believers in Asia Minor to be His people (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Peter 1:15-16), and we can see a distinct parallel between Ephesians 4:1 and Colossians 1:10, where Paul similarly writes “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Most interpreters view “calling” (Grk. *klēsis*, κλήσις) here in relation to the preaching of the gospel, or being called into God’s Kingdom. Paul says of his own Jewish people in Romans 11:29, “for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable,” as He designated them to perform a critical function whereby salvation would ultimately be spread out to the nations. While these might be some of the thoughts in Paul’s mind in composing Ephesians 4:1, O’Brien summarizes the key thrust: “As those who have been *called* into one body...they have a divinely ordained role in God’s purposes for the cosmos (Eph. 3:10). But God’s gracious calling not only bestows great privileges on them; it also carries with it solemn responsibilities.”⁵⁷ Paul has said for his readers to live a life worthy of the great call upon them, as *axiōs* (ἀξιῶς) relates to “the motivating power residing in God’s prior action” (TDNT).⁵⁸ If God has performed great things on their behalf via His Son, then Believers as a result are to be a worthy demonstration of such great things via their lives on Earth.

Walking worthily of the calling God has placed on Ephesians’ audience, Paul says that they are to “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love”

⁵³ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁵⁴ Wood, in *EXP*, 11:54.

⁵⁵ Witherington, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 279.

⁵⁶ Bruce, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 333.

⁵⁷ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 275.

⁵⁸ W. Foerster, “*axiōs, anaxiōs*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 63.

(Ephesians 4:2, NIV). These characteristics certainly concur with the fruit of the Spirit seen in Galatians 5:22-23, but we see a closer relationship demonstrated with Colossians 3:12-15:

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Messiah rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

The character traits Paul lists were virtues often looked down upon by Greco-Roman culture. One of the most significant ones is *tapeinophrosunē* (ταπεινοφροσύνη), “humility” or “lowliness” (RSV). Foulkes explains, “Very significantly, the Greek noun *tapeinophrosunē* does not seem to have been used before New Testament times, and the corresponding adjective *tapeinos* [ταπεινός] nearly always had a bad meaning, and was associated with words with the sense of slavish, mean, ignoble.”⁵⁹ Epictetus listed this among qualities that cannot be commended, instructing his listeners that when they go see a man in Athens, “do so without humbling yourself, and without desire or aversion, and then things will go well for you” (*Discourses* 3.24.56).⁶⁰ The First Century historian Josephus also reflected on how this was viewed negatively, expressing “how Galba was made emperor and returned out of Spain to Rome; and how he was accused by the soldiers as a cowardly [*tapeinophrosunē*] person, and slain by treachery in the middle of the market place at Rome” (*Wars of the Jews* 4.494).⁶¹

Witherington does try to balance some of this out, indicating, “Gentleness or meekness was occasionally commended in the Greek tradition, but normally only as the behavior of the superior toward an inferior.”⁶² Instructing a largely non-Jewish audience in Asia Minor, Paul wants his readers to understand that possessing humility is appropriate and worthy of Believers in Yeshua. It was a character trait highly valued in his own Jewish culture. Lincoln comments, “there are numerous OT references to God’s activity in bringing down the proud and arrogant and exalting the humble.”⁶³ Job 5:11 may be such a reference: “He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.” The DSS also reflect the importance of humility, as the Qumran community believed that the Spirit of Light “engenders humility, patience, abundant compassion, perpetual goodness, insight, understanding, and powerful wisdom” (1QS 4.2).⁶⁴ More than anything else, the significant virtue of humility (Philippians 2:5; Acts 20:9) is something emphasized by the Lord who Paul urges his audience to follow after, as He said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS [Jeremiah 6:16]” (Matthew 11:29).

Yeshua also taught, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3-4). Humbling oneself will enable a person to become least, and then be able to serve others in the Kingdom of God properly (Luke 9:46). Some have taken this as meaning that there are to be no top-down decisions in the *ekklesia*, as though no rulings can be made from clergy and then enforced among laity, as all decisions must instead be made from the bottom-up. This is not concurrent with either Yeshua’s or Paul’s

⁵⁹ Foulkes, 108.

⁶⁰ Epictetus: *The Discourses*, ed. Christopher Gill (London: Everyman, 1995), 211.

⁶¹ Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987).

⁶² Witherington, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 284.

⁶³ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 235.

⁶⁴ Wise, Abegg, and Cook, 130.

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view, as *the attitudes* of a person are in view, not how decisions are made. God giving the Torah to Moses who then had to give it to Ancient Israel was a top-down action; the decrees of the Prophets delivering words from the Almighty were surely top-down; the rulings of the Jerusalem Council were also top-down. But even though there are scores of top-down decisions in the Scriptures, those who serve the Lord have the responsibility of ministering to His people in a proper manner. If they are representatives of the King of kings in a full-time capacity, then they must be sure to represent His humility, love, and wisdom to all they encounter, and they should not at all be domineering. **This ran counter to most of the Greco-Roman character traits of the First Century.**

A key trait that Paul wants his audience to possess—and this would be especially true of leaders in the Body of Messiah—is “showing tolerance for one another in love.” One is to “spare no effort” (NEB) to accept other people as fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, demonstrating a certain decree of tolerance in the Body of Messiah.

It is not difficult to see why many interpreters find strong echoes of ecumenicism in Ephesians 3:2b-3. Paul desires his audience to function as God’s Temple (Ephesians 2:14-22), a grand unity among which His Spirit inside of His people is able to be manifest (1 Corinthians 12:13). He tells them to be “eager” (RSV) or “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (NIV). The verb *tēreō* (τηρέω) means to “to watch over, protect, guard” (LS),⁶⁵ in that they must be diligent in their efforts of looking over the sacred trust that the Lord has given them as His people. Reflecting on this from a Christian perspective, O’Brien says,

“Since the church has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of his goodness and the pattern on which the reconciled universe of the future will be modelled...believers are expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To *keep* this unity must mean to maintain it *visibly*.”⁶⁶

The kind of unity that is depicted by the Scriptures is different than man-made, insisted uniformity. The testimony of the Bible is clear in the fact that God’s people are diverse, and the diversity they possess—be it cultural or ideological—can be a great asset for success. But it is important that if God’s people possess true unity by His Spirit, that there will be more uniformity than disuniformity. *There will be sufficient outward commonality that will bind them together and bring stability.* When we look at the diverse segments of the Jewish Synagogue and Christian Church, although there is indeed diversity in faith practice and tradition, there is still a significant degree of commonality and stability. The Messianic community today, a benefactor of the Synagogue and Church, is still working through some of this. We do need more unity, and we also need more uniformity.⁶⁷ Some of this will take time, but I have confidence that the stability that so many of us pray for every day is achievable if we can be led by the Spirit, as opposed to either human innuendo or an agenda that takes people away from the mandate given to us to be a blessing to others.

Ephesians 4:4-6 describe elements of Biblical faith that many consider to possess some kind of early creedal formula.⁶⁸ This section was frequently used in Christendom to promote grand ecumenical unity in the Twentieth Century, even though that is not Paul’s intention within the scope of his letter. While Paul wants Believers to be united, such a unity was different than the kind of ecumenical unity that liberal Christians advocate among all Believers. *Paul opposed false doctrines and heresies when appropriate (Ephesians 4:14),* something that the ecumenical

⁶⁵ LS, 805.

⁶⁶ O’Brien, *Ephesians*, pp 279-280.

⁶⁷ Consult the chapter “The Proper Protocol,” appearing in author’s book *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

⁶⁸ Bruce, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 335.

movements of the past century seldom did. The Apostle Paul worked for unity within the Body of Messiah when bigger issues were at stake, and Believers had to be united around them, over and against various superficial things.⁶⁹ Dunnam properly summarizes, “The fact is that the whole sentence expresses one fundamental: we all belong to the Lord; faith is the inward disposition of the heart, and baptism is the outward sign by which we are united in the Lord.”⁷⁰ What this might mean for us as Messianic Believers is something worthy of exploration.

The ecumenical movements of the past century got it wrong because they just tried to unite a diverse group of Christians from all over the world, who would often just fight one another and not work together for various social causes. While there are certainly elements of working to better our planet and the lives of other people that Believers should be concerned with, Paul’s view throughout Ephesians, and the role of the *ekklēsia*, is far more significant. Lincoln comments,

“The writer recognizes that what his readers hope for in the end will determine what they practice in the present. The one hope of final cosmic unity is therefore meant to produce the urgent effort to maintain and demonstrate the anticipation of this in the Church.”⁷¹

Indeed, the Body of Messiah and the redemption that Believers have experienced is to be a snapshot of the redemption that is to one day be experienced by all Creation (Ephesians 1:10, 19-22). Surely, if the *ekklēsia* is to be a tangible representation on Earth of that future redemption, then brothers and sisters in the Lord must be united. The ecumenical movements of the past often failed to emphasize *this* unity, and today’s Messianic movement is likely a long way from seeing this kind of unity achieved.

There is some significant theology weaved in to Ephesians 4:4-6. Having stated “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling,*” an indication that Paul’s audience is a part of a larger corporate Body of Messiah with all individuals inhabited by the same Holy Spirit—he goes on to say that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all,” listing off critical elements of what is to form their identity. Whether you are aware of it or not, there is an indirect reference to the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) here, something not inconsistent in Paul’s writing (1 Corinthians 8:4; 1 Timothy 2:5).

All of God’s people are to be filled with the same Spirit (Ephesians 2:2), knowing the same Lord Yeshua (Ephesians 1:12), and recognizing themselves as children of the same Father (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). This Spirit, Son, and Father order is also employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.” Paul most certainly recognizes the tri-unity of the Godhead in Ephesians 4:4-6,⁷² but of particular importance is how the Father and Son are both represented as Deity. The Son is recognized by the title “Lord” (used for YHWH in the Tanach), and God is recognized as “Father.”⁷³ Paul has previously written in 1 Corinthians 8:6,

“[Y]et for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.”

The special relationship Believers have toward the Father is because He is “over all and through all and in all,” a likely allusion to Malachi 2:10: “Do we not all have one father? Has not

⁶⁹ Foulkes, 111.

⁷⁰ Dunnam, 198.

⁷¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 239.

⁷² Foulkes, 112 fn#1; Wood, in *EXP*, 11:57; Witherington, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 286.

⁷³ Cf. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 283; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 239.

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one God created us?" If we are all children of the same Father, then we are certainly to be united as His people. This is why immersion or baptism is highlighted in Ephesians 4:5, because water immersion is a practice that unites all Believers, and knows no gender barriers (Galatians 3:27). Wood remarks, "Baptism is one because it makes one. It provides the evidence that all Christians, without discrimination as to color, race, sex, age, or class, share the grace of Christ."⁷⁴ Water immersion was something that Jews of all classes performed when going to the Temple, and it was something required of all proselytes male and female. For Believers in Yeshua, it is a unifying element that while marking them as holy, does not mark any one Believer as better than another. The act of immersion allows them to identify, in some small way, with the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (Romans 6:3-4).

Ephesians 5:18-20

"psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah to God, even the Father."

Dunnam describes⁷⁵ how the *ekklēsia* is "an embassy of God's kingdom set right down in the center of whatever evil orders may be struggling for dominance."⁷⁶ Such a representation of God's Kingdom must be a haven of His proper and good character, just as Paul says, "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

A specific example of how not to be foolish, but instead demonstrate God's wisdom, is detailed by Paul: "do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18, RSV). This is probably an allusion to Proverbs 23:31-32, "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper." Paul is very specific in Ephesians 5:18 in telling his audience to not be intoxicated with wine. This is not a prohibition against drinking alcohol, but is rather a prohibition against drunkenness, a trait of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:13). This is similar to the requirement of overseers not being drunkards (1 Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:6). The Apostle Peter commended his audience in how the pagans "are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*" (1 Peter 4:4).

While some from various traditions will take Ephesians 5:18 as a support for a total prohibition of drinking alcoholic beverages, the very mention of wine (Grk. *oinos*, οἶνος) indicates how common it was consumed in Mediterranean culture. Certainly while there were wines that were stronger in their alcoholic content than others, the question of whether an alcoholic wine was even consumed is really only asked by American Bible teachers. The United States has an alcohol culture of extremes where people either drink to excess, or fully abstain. The question is not asked by European Bible teachers for whom drinking alcohol in moderation is a part of daily living.⁷⁷ The kind of drunk activity that Paul would absolutely be speaking against is that epitomized by the worship of the Greek god Dionysius (Roman Bacchus). The celebration of Dionysia "was often accompanied by drunken excesses, sexual license, and the tearing to pieces of a human or animal victim, symbolizing the god, and the burying of the

⁷⁴ Wood, in *EXP*, 11:56.

⁷⁵ This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁷⁷ If necessary, consult the FAQ, "Alcohol."