

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

BIBLE TEXT : Ephesians 3:14-21; 4:1-16.

LESSON 402 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Ephesians 4:1).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

¹⁶ That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

²¹ Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-16

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

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Apostles' Prayer for the Ephesians

1. To be strengthened in the inner man, Ephesians 3:14-16;

Romans 9:23

²³ And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

2 Corinthians 4:16

¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

Colossians 1:11

¹¹ Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

Colossians 1:27

²⁷ To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

2. That Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, Ephesians 3:17;

John 14:23

²³ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him..

3. To comprehend the vastness of the love of God, Ephesians 3:18;

Ephesians 1:18

¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Romans 10:12

¹² For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

4. To be filled with all the fullness of Christ, Ephesians 3:19;

Hebrews 13:21

²¹ Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

John 1:16

¹⁶ And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

II An Exhortation to Christian Unity

1. A walk worthy of a Christian's high calling is necessary, Ephesians 4:1;

Philippians 1:27

²⁷ Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

1 Thessalonians 2:12

¹² That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

2. The fruit of the Spirit is manifested in our relations one with another, Ephesians 4:2;

Acts 20:19

¹⁹ Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

Galatians 5:22-23

baptism,

⁶ One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

⁷ But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

¹³ Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

¹⁴ That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Colossians 3:12

¹² Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Colossians 3:13

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. The unity of the Spirit is preserved in the bond of peace, Ephesians 4:3;

John 14:27

²⁷ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴ And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

III The Unity of All Pertaining to God

1. Christ's Church is one body. There is one Spirit — the Spirit of Christ, Ephesians 4:4;

Romans 12:5

⁵ So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Romans 12:11-12

¹¹ Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

¹² Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Hebrews 6:19

¹⁹ Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

2. There is one Lord — Lord Christ; one faith — Christ's Doctrine; one baptism — He ordained it, Ephesians 4:5;

Matthew 28:19

¹⁹ Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Galatians 3:27

²⁷ For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 3:28

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

3. There is one God in whom we live and have our being, Ephesians 4:6;

Malachi 2:10

¹⁰ Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

Romans 11:36

³⁶ For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 2:5

⁵ For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

IV The Work of the Church on Earth

1. The gifts were bestowed upon men when Christ ascended on High, Ephesians 4:7-10;

Psalms 68:18

¹⁸ Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity

captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for the rebellious also*, that the LORD God might dwell *among them*.

Romans 12:6-8

⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

⁷ Or ministry, *let us wait on our ministering*: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

⁸ Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

⁴ Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

⁵ And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

⁶ And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

⁸ For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

⁹ To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

¹⁰ To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

¹¹ But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Hebrews 9:24

²⁴ For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

2. Instructors were appointed that the church might be brought to perfection, and that the children of God might not be led astray by false doctrine, Ephesians 4:11-16

Isaiah 28:9

⁹ Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are* weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

Hebrews 13:9

⁹ Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For *it is* a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

2 Timothy 4:5

⁵ But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

NOTES:

God Our Father

This lesson starts out with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. He declares that the whole family of the redeemed in Heaven and earth is named for the Father. In human relationship are we not named after our earthly father? Through Jesus Christ we are all made one in our heavenly relationship, if we have been born again and our names enrolled in the heavenly records. God is not the Father of those who reject His Son and His plan of salvation. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). It is our spiritual relationship to God that makes Him our Father. God is not the

author of sin nor the Father of those whose lives are sinful. Neither are they brothers who reject our Elder Brother and walk after the flesh.

God's Riches

The first part of Paul's prayer is for them to be strengthened in the inner man, according to the **riches** of his glory. God's riches are unlimited. It is all a free gift. When a wealthy man gives a gift, he is expected to give a gift according to his ability. When a poor man gives a gift, one expects it to be small, for he is not able to give much. But think what God's resources are! And He is able to go even beyond what we can think or ask. The gift of Christ to man is the measure of God's love, and the death of Christ for man is the measure of His love.

Paul desires that Christ dwell in their hearts by faith and that they be rooted and grounded in love, so that they may be able to comprehend the immeasurableness of God's love.

The natural man is strengthened by earthly food, the inward man by that which comes from Heaven. To survive, they both must be fed. Neglect the body, it perishes. Neglect the spiritual man, he dies. Paul wants them to know the love of Christ, which is abounding toward them so richly, that they may be filled with all the fullness of God. Someone has said that to be filled with God is a great thing; to be filled with the fullness of God is still greater; but to be filled with all the fullness of God confounds the understanding. It means to be filled with meekness, goodness, gentleness, love, patience, justice, holiness, mercy and truth. Few exemplify the stature of fullness. Many show the stature of littleness and emptiness.

Paul prayed that the Ephesians might attain to the very highest in their Christian experience. Does it not portray the perfection of the Bride of Christ? In days of old, kings looked for human perfection in selecting their brides. Why should not we expect our Christ to look for that spiritual perfection in the Church, His Bride who is to walk side by side with Him in His Kingdom here on this earth?

A Careful Walk

Walk worthy of the vocation! How high is our standard? In our own heart, what is the standard we have set up? Do we consider that we should be full of meekness, full of love, full of joy, full of humility, full of justice? Do we hold as high a standard for ourselves as we do for another?

The standard we hold must be weighed on God's scale and not on our own ideas or shortcomings. Every step in this Christian race should be a step of courage, of faith, of love, of meekness, of loyalty to the truth. The Lord expects it of us; He is grieved if we fail; and by our failure we may lose our place in the Bridehood of Christ.

Unity

"United we stand, divided we fall," is not a Bible quotation but it is quite true. A story is told of a father who had several sons. One day he took some sticks and bound them into a bundle and brought them to his sons and asked each son to break the bundle. Not one of them could break it. The father then took the bundle, untied it and took each stick and broke it, showing that in unity there is strength.

We are exhorted to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (**Ephesians 4:3** ³ Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.).

Jesus said the gates of hell should not prevail against His Church. Why? It is a united Church. The members may live in

Africa, America, Japan, West Indies, anywhere on the earth; it is one Church, the Church Militant here on earth. One day it will become the Church Triumphant — the Bride of Christ.

One Body

The Church is likened to the body of Christ. Jesus is the Head. All are members one with another. There is no friction in the human body. All members work in perfect accord and in conjunction with one another. All are in perfect obedience and subjection to the head. In the Church every member should labour for the comfort and edification of the whole, and to honour the Head, which is Christ. Paul, by his admonitions, exhortations and encouragements is striving to point the way to a perfect Church.

There is one Lord — Jesus Christ; one faith for the whole world, and that faith is the doctrines set forth in the Word of God by Jesus Christ and the Apostles; one baptism, the one Jesus ordained when He was here on earth; one God, Father of us all, Jews and Gentiles, and fountain of all being, who is above all.

Christ's Ascension and Descension

"When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)" This same Jesus who triumphed over death, hell and the grave on that resurrection morning, ascended up on High leading captivity captive. In Psalm 68:18 we find the Psalmist giving the same quotations as if he were picturing a military triumph. Also in Judges 5:12 we read: "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive."

In olden times the conqueror often drove through the streets with the conquered fastened behind his chariot; and amidst the applause of the people, threw out to them gifts of the bounty he had taken. Jesus descended to this earth as God in man and suffered the insults and rebuffs of men, was crucified and placed in the tomb, but that was not the end. He arose and ascended up on High far above all heavens, that He might fulfil all things.

Gave Gifts unto Men

"He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Jesus looks into the natural qualifications of the members of the Body of Christ and gives to them according to their ability. It is all done for the perfecting of the saints.

Just as we need schools to teach our children the ways of life, so the church needs pastors, evangelists, and teachers to instruct Christians in the path of righteousness and to build them up in the most holy faith. Those who are as children, are often tossed about from one belief to another before they become grounded in the truth. When they grow up to become stalwart men and women in the faith they are able to separate the true from the false.

All these teachers and instructors in the Gospel are given us to help us become full-grown men or women in Christ Jesus — united in one perfect Church.

QUESTIONS

1. Mention some of the things Paul prayed for in his prayer for the Ephesians.
2. How great is God's love to man?
3. How carefully should a Christian walk?
4. Name some of the gifts Jesus gave to men.
5. Can all men claim God as their Father?
6. What brings unity in the Church?
7. Tell how Paul compares the Church to the body.
8. Who is the Head?