

Ephesians 4:1-6¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

- II. The Conduct of the Church ([4:1-6:24](#))
 - A. Live in Unity ([4:1-16](#))
 - 1. The basis of unity ([4:1-6](#))

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ²Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. ³Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.

Notes**[4:1](#)**

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you.—The first three words in the Greek text are the same as [Rom 12:1](#), *parakalō oun humas*—“therefore, I urge you” (cf. *parakaleō* [^{TG}<[G3870](#)>, ^{ZG}4151] “urge”). The expression signals the beginning of an appeal.

to lead a life worthy of your calling.—“To lead a life” is a good rendering of the Greek word “walk.” It does not speak of a literal walk; it is used as a metaphor for one's lifestyle. Believers are first exhorted to have a proper attitude toward unity ([4:1-3](#)) and then are shown how the three persons of the Trinity serve as the basis of this unity ([4:4-6](#)). This section ([4:1-6](#)) is the sixth of eight long sentences in this epistle (cf. [1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [2:1-7](#); [3:2-13](#), [14-19](#); [4:1-6](#), [11-16](#); [6:14-20](#)) with 71 words.

[4:2](#)

making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.—The participle “making allowance” or “forbearing” carries an imperatival force and appears to relate back to the enjoinder to lead a life worthy of one's calling, implying that it is accomplished by forbearing one another in love. The word “forbear” is frequently used in classical literature, meaning “to take up, to bear up, to endure.” It is used 16 times in the *LXX*, where it includes the idea of God's endurance of the Israelites' vain offerings ([Isa 1:13](#)) and Job's endurance through great trials ([Job 6:11](#), [26](#)). It is used in the NT 15 times. It is used when Jesus asks how long he must put up with the disciples ([Matt 17:17](#); [Mark 9:19](#); [Luke 9:41](#)) and when Paul speaks of enduring in persecution ([1 Cor 4:12](#); cf. [2 Thess 1:4](#)). Hence, this word refers to bearing or enduring with respect to things or persons. The word “faults” does not appear in the Greek text, and its use in the NLT is perhaps too restrictive. We are to make allowance not only for faults but also for differences.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 76-81.

[4:3](#)

binding yourselves together with peace.—This is not a new or additional exhortation, but further explains the first part of the verse. Believers are to keep or maintain the unity established by the Holy Spirit in a bond consisting of peace.

Commentary

The first three chapters laid the foundation by revealing that God has chosen, from among Jews and Gentiles, a people for himself who are united into one body, the church. Paul has characterized the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles as “one new people” ([2:15](#)), the body of Christ, and has prayed for the perfection of that unity through the mutual experience of Christ’s empowering love ([3:16-19](#)). He now demonstrates how this is accomplished by God’s power through the ministry of gifted people given by Christ to the church so that the body might grow into spiritual maturity.

In the latter three chapters of this epistle, Paul instructs God’s people how to conduct themselves in union with Christ and with each other. Paul used only one imperative in [chapters 1-3 \(2:11\)](#), whereas forty imperatives appear in [chapters 4-6](#). In [chapters 4](#) and [5](#), the inferential conjunction “therefore” (*oun* [^{TG} <[G3767](#)>, ^{ZG}4036]) is used five times in connection with the imperative “live your lives” (lit., “walk” from *peripateō* [^{TG} <[G4043](#)>, ^{ZG}4344]; see [4:1, 17](#); [5:2, 8, 15](#)), and in the conclusion the exhortation “to stand” (*histēmi* [^{TG} <[G2476](#)>, ^{ZG}2705]) is given to defend against satanic attacks ([6:10-20](#)). All of these data emphasize the fact that Paul was exhorting the believers to live out the spiritual realities that had been given to them. In particular, in the first three chapters of Ephesians they were taught that believing Jews and Gentiles were united into one body; on this basis, Paul then exhorts them to walk in unity. He reminds them that his imprisonment had come about because he had declared to believing Gentiles ([3:13](#)) that they were fellow heirs in Christ with believing Jews. Thus, he told them to live “worthily” (*axiōs* [^{TG} <[G516](#)>, ^{ZG}547]) of this new position. The Greek adverb *axiōs* suggests a comparison of two things, like a weighing on a scale. Thus, to live worthily of our calling is to live in a way that matches the stature of that calling. Our conduct is to be “worthy,” “comparable,” or “suitable” to God’s calling.

Paul’s exhortation to lead a life worthy of their calling is further qualified by a declaration of the manner in which it is to be accomplished ([4:2-3](#)). First, believers are to be humble. Whereas formerly, pride engendered deep divisions between Jews and Gentiles, humility engenders unity among them. The supreme example of humility is Christ ([Phil 2:6-8](#)).

Second, along with humility believers are to exhibit gentleness or meekness, the opposite of roughness. This word does not imply that one should become a “doormat.” Aristotle categorized the quality Paul is speaking of as a moral virtue that is the mean between one who is angry against everyone on all occasions and the one who is never angry about anything (*Magna Moralia* 1.22.2-3). One can illustrate this with the temperament of dogs. A well-trained dog is always angry at the master’s foe and never angry at the master’s friends. So a gentle person is angry when a wrong has been done, but accepting and friendly when all is right and good. This quality of gentleness is seen in Jesus, who was gentle and humble in heart ([Matt 11:29](#)) and yet displayed anger, for example, toward those who had transformed the Temple into a den of thieves ([Matt 21:12-13](#)). Moses is depicted as one who was more gentle than all people on earth ([Num 12:3](#)), and yet he displayed anger when he found the people of Israel sinning against God by creating a golden calf ([Exod 32](#)).

Third, believers are to display patience. Patience is achieved only by means of a true perspective of hope. For instance, Rome would wait patiently in the midst of defeat with the hope of winning the war ([1 Macc 8:4](#)). Farmers wait patiently for the anticipated harvest. The Old Testament prophets waited patiently for God to act ([Jas 5:7-11](#)). God patiently holds back his anger against humanity with the hope of repentance ([Rom 2:4](#)). In fact, Paul lists patience as among the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal 5:22](#)). Most

believers want patience—but they want it immediately! Certainly, in the present context Paul enjoins patience as a necessary ingredient for the life of Jewish and Gentile believers who comprise the body of Christ.

The concluding participial clause, “making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love” is not a fourth quality after “humbleness, gentleness, and patience” but rather refers back to the exhortation for believers to lead a life worthy of their calling. This participial clause most likely has an imperatival force, calling for the church, which is composed of believing Jews and Gentiles—once hostile to one another—to be united into one body. As noted above, the word “faults” is not in the Greek text. Therefore, it may be construed that we are enjoined not only to forbear one another’s faults but also each other’s differences—that is, in areas where no wrongdoing is involved. No doubt there remained many such differences between the two groups, even as in today’s church with all its diverse elements. Obedience to this exhortation eliminates resentment among members within the body of Christ.

Along with the participial clause “making allowance for each other’s faults,” Paul introduces a second participial clause: “[making] every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.” As with the first participial clause, so also this participial clause has an imperatival force, as it relates back to the injunction to lead a life worthy of the believers’ calling (4:1). It must be observed that believers are not instructed to *make* unity but to *keep* the unity already in existence. It refers to the union of believing Jews and Gentiles brought about by the creation of “one new people,” so making “peace” (2:15). In the present context, Paul states that this unity was achieved by the Holy Spirit and is exhibited in a bond that consists of peace, by which believers will lovingly maintain relationships with each other in spite of differences.

In 4:4-6 Paul develops the basis for unity, listing seven elements centered on the three persons of the Trinity. The sevenfold use of “one” gives emphasis to the concept of unity. First, there is one body, referring to the universal church already mentioned (1:23; 2:16; 3:5-6). As previously stated, it is not Gentiles becoming Jews, as in the Old Testament, nor Jews becoming Gentiles, but believing Jews and Gentiles becoming one body of believers. They are no longer two entities but one. Second, there is one Spirit. This refers to the Holy Spirit mentioned in 2:18, 22, where it states that this body of believers has access to God in one Spirit and where the body is portrayed as a temple in which the Spirit dwells. Third, there is one hope, which all believers have in common regarding their future with God, a confidence that began at the time they were “called” (1:18; see also 1:4; 2:7; 4:1). Before conversion, the Gentiles were without hope and without God in the world (2:12). Now having been brought near to God, united into one body in Christ and reconciled to God (2:11-3:13), they have hope. Since both believing Jews and Gentiles have “one” (or “the same”) hope, it further supports the concept of unity portrayed in these verses.

The fourth element of unity is “one Lord” (4:5), no doubt a reference to Christ, since Paul has just mentioned the Holy Spirit in 4:4 and will mention the Father in 4:6. Christ is the “one Lord” who provided redemption (1:7), hope (1:12), and headship over the church (1:22-23). It is Christ who brought believing Jews and Gentiles into one body; so he is the “one” Lord. Fifth, there is one faith. The reference to faith here most likely is not the object of faith, that is, the body of truth believed by Christians (as in Acts 6:7; 1 Tim 3:9; 4:1, 6; Jude 1:3, 20) but the act of faith, which is exercised by all Christians in Christ their Lord (cf. Col 2:7). Earlier, Paul had mentioned that the Ephesians had expressed their faith when they heard the message (1:13) and that their faith in the Lord Jesus was widely known (1:15). Thus, it is one faith in one Lord. Sixth, there is one baptism. Most commentators consider this a reference to water baptism (e.g., Abbott 1897:109; Lincoln 1990:240; Best 1998:369). In the early church, faith in Christ was closely tied to water baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16, 35-39; 19:5; 1 Cor 1:13-15). However, water baptism is an outward manifestation of the inward reality of the believers’ union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Hence, the “one baptism” may refer to the believers’ identification with Christ (O’Brien 1999:284; Hoehner 2002:517-518). This is similar to the baptism of

Israel into Moses as they went through the Red Sea ([1 Cor 10:2](#)) and the baptism of the disciples with reference to Christ's death ([Mark 10:38](#)). This same concept is seen in other New Testament passages ([Rom 6:1-11](#); [Gal 3:27](#); [Col 2:12](#)). Hence, the "one baptism" may refer to our identification with Christ's death and resurrection, which serves as the basis for the ritual of water baptism. It is unlikely that the baptism refers to Spirit baptism because the phrase "one baptism" is in the triad of elements of unity that pertain to the second person of the Trinity ("one Lord") and because nothing in the broader context ([4:1-16](#)) refers to the Spirit's baptism.

The seventh and final element of unity is "one God and Father" ([4:6](#)). In spite of claims that many gods exist, there is only one true God (cf. [1 Cor 8:5-6](#)), who is also "Father" (cf. [Rom 15:6](#); [1 Cor 15:24](#); [2 Cor 1:3](#); [11:31](#); [Gal 1:4](#)). God is further described as "over us all," which refers not to all humanity but to all believers ([John 1:12](#); [Gal 3:26](#)). That this is not a reference to all humanity is borne out in the present context, which speaks of the unity of all believers modeled by the Father of all believers. Furthermore, the next words of the verse "and in us all and living through us all" would argue against the universal Father of all humanity. The New Testament does not depict that God is in every human being but that he resides in believers only ([Rom 8:9](#)). Believers need to recognize his transcendent sovereignty over them ("over all") and his imminent involvement with them ("in all and living through all"). The indication that God is in all believers ("over all") is the indwelling Spirit ([John 14:16-17](#); [Rom 8:9](#); [1 Cor 2:12](#); [6:19-20](#); [Gal 3:2](#); [4:6](#); [1 John 2:27](#); [3:24](#); [4:13](#)) and his intimate presence. Paul had previously prayed (in [3:17](#)) that Christ might be at home in their hearts. Although Christ was already in them, Paul wanted him to be central in their lives. Earlier Paul spoke about God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the corporate body of the church ([2:22](#)); he now is talking about the personal dwelling of God in individual believers.

Two observations should be noted about this list of the seven unifying elements ([4:4-6](#)). First, the Trinity is an integral part of this treatise on unity. The one body of believers is vitalized by one *Spirit*, so that all believers have hope. That body is united to its one *Lord* (Christ) by each member's one act of faith and identification with him in one baptism. One *God*, the Father, is supreme over all, resides in all, and is operative in all. This is in line with the rest of Ephesians, which is known for its abundant references to the Trinity (cf. [1:4-14](#), [17](#); [2:18](#), [22](#); [3:4-5](#), [14-17](#); [4:4-6](#); [5:18-20](#)).

Second, the order in the listing of the three persons of the Trinity is worth noting. Rather than God the Father, the Holy Spirit is listed first. Most likely, the reason for this is that in the preceding verses Paul has discussed being "united in the Spirit" ([4:3](#)) and in the immediately following verses ([4:7-13](#)) he elaborates on the gifts of the Spirit. The same order of the persons of the Trinity is given in [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#), where Paul also expatiates on the gifts of the Spirit. From a theological perspective, Paul works back to the ultimate source—the Father, since all proceeds from him.

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Ephesians 4:1-6²

4:1. This chapter begins the practical section of Ephesians. Paul normally balanced his epistles with a theological portion and a practical portion. The "therefore" of [verse 1](#) serves as a bridge connecting all the apostle had written up to this point with what follows.

In the Greek text "beseech" (*parakalō*) is first in the sentence for emphasis. Paul was concerned that believers should cross the bridge from analysis to action, from theology to morality, from Christian faith to Christian life, from the revelation of doctrine to the development of practice. He made this very strong appeal as "the prisoner of the Lord."

[Verses 1-16](#) describe the unity and diversity of the New Testament Church. Paul began his exhortation by appealing to the Ephesians to live lives worthy of the calling God had given them. "Worthy" (*axiōs*) is an adverb of manner used with scales. Basically it means "bringing up the other beam of the scales" or "bringing into equilibrium." It carries the idea of one thing being the equivalent of another thing. In other words, a Christian's practice should "weigh as much as" or "be equivalent to" his profession. If it truly does "weigh as much as," that person will be doing what the whole Book of Ephesians tells him to do.

4:2. Furthermore, it will be reflected in the three qualities mentioned in [verse 2](#). The first two, "lowliness and meekness," refer to a person's attitude toward self. A person with a proper balance between profession and practice will be humble, will not be full of haughty pride. A truly humble individual will be in balance, not thinking too highly of himself, nor, at the other extreme, putting himself down. Such a person will also be meek, which is the opposite of self-assertion. The third quality, forbearance, is a social virtue, expressing the ability to be patient with the weaknesses of other people.

4:3. The absence of these three qualities will definitely jeopardize Christian unity. Unity does not just happen. Because this is a present tense idea, we must constantly work at it.

4:4. The apostle then gave the perfect example of unity—that which is exhibited among the members of the Trinity. They never disagree. [Verse 4](#) describes the work of the Holy Spirit. There is one Body, and the Holy Spirit is the One who makes us members of it. As a result, we share "one hope," an expectant attitude concerning the second coming of Christ and all the benefits related to it.

4:5. [Verse 5](#) reminds us that there is only one Lord. When Paul wrote these words, nearly every cult of mystery religion had its own lord. However, the New Testament has only one Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He is the only means of access into His church.

The term "faith" is used several different ways in the Scriptures. Sometimes it relates to the subjective placing of confidence in God; sometimes it refers to the body of doctrine that believers accept; sometimes it refers to a means of access. The last is the use in this context.

The statement concerning "one baptism" does not deny the reality of other types of baptism (in water, in the Holy Spirit, in suffering) but refers to the one baptism without which the others would not be possible—the baptism into the body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 12:13](#)).

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 134-135.

4:6. The Father is described as the One who originated all that [verses 4](#) and [5](#) describe. The Father is sovereign ("above all"), the sustainer ("through all"), and the One who gives the energy for all that happens ("in... all").