

Jesus Christ – Conqueror and Unifier

Ephesians 4:1-16 (ESV)

- 1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
- 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
- 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—
- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
- 8 Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”
- 9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?
- 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
- 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,
- 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
- 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
- 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.
- 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,
- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

1. The Body of Christ – One in the Spirit. Vs. 1-6.

For further reading on the dynamics of applying these principles of unity and peace in all settings of life, including work and business, read “Loving Monday” by John D. Beckett.

2. Gifted by His Spirit. Vs. 7-8.

For more on the Spiritual gifts that Christ gives to Christians, including their purpose and function, see Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

3. The Triumphant Victor! Vs. 8-10

Consider these verses with regard to the location of Hell (hades) and Paradise - then and now.

- In **Matthew 12:40** Jesus said he would spend three days AND three nights in the heart of the earth.
- In **Luke 16:19-31** Jesus identifies a place called "Abraham's bosom" (which is a Hebrew idiom for "paradise") within eyesight of a place of torment called "hell" separated by a "great gulf."
- In **Luke 23:43** Jesus tells the thief that was saved while on the cross next to Jesus that on that very day he would join him in "paradise," not Heaven.
- In **I Peter 3:19** Peter says that Jesus preached to the "spirits in prison."
- In **Ephesians 4:8-10** Paul says that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth after his crucifixion and led "captivity captive" i.e., "a band of captives" when he ascended.
- In **John 20:17** Jesus tells Mary not to touch him because he has not yet ascended to "my Father."
- In **Matthew 27:52-54** we see that after the resurrection of Jesus, "many" of the resurrected saints wandered into Jerusalem and appeared to many.
- Jesus put Satan and his minions to open shame as He triumphed over them in His Ascension. (**Colossians 2:15**)
- In **Hebrews 9:11-12**, there is a vivid account of Christ offering the one-time sacrifice of His Blood for the atonement of all who believe on Him. (Read the entirety of **Hebrews chapters 9 & 10** for an extensive description of Christ's "once for all" offering of His blood for the redemption of mankind.)

Now, let's compile these events as they are described in these passages.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:40** that he would be in the "heart of the earth" for three days and three nights. He told the dying man next to him on the cross that he would join him there "this day." (**Luke 23:43**) Jesus identified such a place (paradise) in **Luke 16:19-31** within eyesight of hades. Peter tells us in **I Peter 3:19** that Jesus preached to these captives ("spirits in prison"). When Jesus appeared to Mary in **John 20**, Jesus notified her in verse 17 that he had resurrected, but not yet ascended to Heaven. Paul said that Jesus led a band of captives when he descended (to receive them) and ascended in **Ephesians 4:8-10**. While leading this "band of captives" from "paradise" to Heaven, Jesus visited with Mary on earth prior to delivering these saints to their final destination. Some of these captives apparently

had already taken an excursion into Jerusalem while Jesus was talking to Mary, according to **Matthew 27:52-54**. Jesus also openly subdues Satan and His minions and puts them to open shame during this glorious, triumphant ascension (**Colossians 2:15**). Jesus, upon His arrival in Heaven (**Hebrews 9:11-12**), offered His blood as the singular, eternal and atoning sacrifice for all of humanity's sin. This atonement becomes efficacious for those who repent of their sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

These Biblical images of Christ's victory over Satan and his triumphant post-resurrection ascension, including in **2 Corinthians 2:14-17**, are very similar to the Roman Triumphs held for the conquering Generals of Rome after successful military campaigns, of which **320** were recorded in Roman History. An avid student of Roman History, American General George S. Patton, Jr., offered in his personal papers the following description of what typically happened during these Triumphs:

“For over a thousand years, Roman conquerors returning from the wars enjoyed the honor of triumph, a tumultuous parade. In the procession came trumpeters, musicians and strange animals from conquered territories, together with carts laden with treasure and captured armaments, and grateful Roman citizens who, though once held captive, had been liberated by the military campaign the conquering General had led. The conquerors rode in a triumphal chariot, the dazed prisoners from the defeated army walking in chains before him. Sometimes his children robed in white stood with him in the chariot or rode the trace horses. A slave stood behind the conqueror holding a laurel wreath over the General's head and whispering in his ear a warning: that all glory is fleeting.”

It is also important to note this ancient, extra-biblical affirmation, found in the Apostles' Creed, of Christ's triumphant descent into Hades to proclaim His victory and to liberate the righteous souls being held in Paradise:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

We may thus surmise the following:

- Paradise in the center of the earth has been evacuated.
- Only the place of torments (Hell, hades) remains there. Hell will be cast into the lake of fire in **Revelation 20:14**.
- Those saints who died prior to the resurrection are now in Heaven, not paradise.
- The rapture of **I Thessalonians 4:15-18** and **I Corinthians 15:51-53** will include only those in Christ since His resurrection.

4. God's Gift to the Church – Gifted Servants. Vs. 11-16