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TRAINING THE MEMBERS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL
UNITY AT BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH OF
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

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TRAINING THE MEMBERS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL
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With a heart of gratitude for my salvation through the precious blood of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I dedicate this project to my God, Yahweh. And to my wife, Genita Noel Hyacinthe, whose love and support surpass what human language can express. Also, to the community of faith of Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale.

I further dedicate this project to my two wonderful mothers, Marguerite Herzulia Hyacinthe and Cinelia Ninna Noel, two amazing women of God.

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PREFACE

This project was accomplished with the help of my sovereign and almighty God, Yahweh. By his grace, he made a way when there seemed to be no way to complete this project. The same way he used Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt from the bondage of slavery, he used me to lead the members of BBCF out of a spiral of disunity through this project.

I will be always grateful for the assistance and encouragement of so many individuals that the Lord put on my side during the execution of this project. I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Genita Noel Hyacinthe, for her unwavering support throughout this project. I could not make it without her. A special thanks to the faithful members of Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale and the leadership of the church that stood with me as Joshua and Caleb stood with Moses. They are really amazing!

Several Faculty members at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary contributed to the success of this project. I cannot pass by without mentioning Dr. Harrod Joseph, Dr. Shane Parker, Dr. Danny Bowen, and the amazing Dr. Rob Plummer, my impeccable supervisor who took my hands to the finish line. The arduous and relentless work of so many friends, families, and colleagues make me believe that the Lord was the author and finisher of this project.

I pray that the Lord will use this project as a guardrail for BBCF members and all Christian sister churches around the world to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity from generations to generations.

John Wesley Hyacinthe

Fort Lauderdale

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While youths' desertion from the church today is not alarming to some, it is a fundamental problem that must be addressed if Christians care about the church's future. Over the centuries, local Christian churches in the United States have experienced a chronic and systematic problem keeping young Christians active in the faith.¹ However, statistics show that the situation is worsening in the American church. Youth desertion affects every Christian denomination, whether in the metropolitan areas or the countryside.

A survey conducted by the Barna group in 2014 shows "the younger a person is the less likely he or she is to attend church."² The lack of a well-structured and coordinated Christian education in these local churches contributes to young Christians' spiritual feeble-mindedness. Solomon's instructions in Proverbs 22:6 to "train up a child in the way he should go"³ resound the current crisis the church is confronting with young believers. These instructions remain valid for parents to raise well-trained children to be part of local churches. This teaching also represents vivid imagery of how local churches must train young Christians. There is a considerable need for a basic biblical structure to mentor young people in local churches. This structure must equip parents with the necessary tools for basic spiritual education at home.

¹ Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," September 27, 2011, <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>.

² Barna Group, "10 Facts about America's Churchless," December 10, 2014, <https://www.barna.com/research/10-facts-about-americas-churchless/>.

³ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale, Florida (BBCF). In 1980, Bethany Missionary Baptist Church in Miami planted BBCF because of the need for a Haitian Baptist Church in the area. For thirty-eight years, BBCF has faithfully ministered the gospel of Jesus Christ in Fort Lauderdale.

In the early 1990s, BBCF took a giant step by constructing one of the most beautiful church buildings in Fort Lauderdale. Soon after the new construction, BBCF registered tremendous numerical growth and the membership attained over six hundred members. The founding pastor's vision and passion led BBCF to a spiritual and organizational level that surpassed most of its sister churches in the Fort Lauderdale area. However, four years after constructing the new church building, a schism occurred in the church over an administrative contention. The split reduced the size of the congregation by more than one hundred members. BBCF continued to grow this split, but the single pastor structure put a heavy load on the senior pastor. As a result, church ministries suffered enormously. One of the areas that suffered the most was the discipleship ministry.

First, when the pastor died in July 2014, he left a void in the church for effective discipleship ministry. The spiritual formation of believers is vital for the church's ministries to ensure a lasting effect on its ability to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Residents of Fort Lauderdale acknowledged BBCF as a church where the sound doctrine of the gospel was preached every Sunday. The preaching of the late pastor attracted many Christians who desired to experience sound Bible preaching. After his death, the church leadership became complacent and neglected discipleship ministry altogether. The practice of discipleship became a lower priority. Due to lack of vision, the church drifted away from its mission to reach the lost souls for Christ.

In the past, BBCF had a reputation for preaching sound doctrine. It also knew many successes, such as constructing the new church building, church planting in nearby cities, mission trips, etc. However, it did not invest much in other ministries, such as

discipleship, family ministry, and mentorship. BBCF was also known for being a child-friendly venue because of the pastoral care of the late pastor. A children's sermon was part of the Sunday morning worship service so that children could hear the Word of God expounded in their own language. However, the church failed to craft a children's ministry that reflected the commands of God in Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:1-4; and Proverbs 22:6.

Second, the church did not pay close attention to family and youth ministries. Some teenagers rebelled against their parents and abandoned church altogether to remove themselves from the authority of their parents. Also, the lack of a well-structured biblical youth ministry contributed to the boredom of many young people in the church. They complained that the church had nothing to offer them. As a result, some followed their friends to other churches and others dropped out of church altogether. The church did not realize the severity of the situation until the youths deserted the church completely.

Third, the church's decline in the outreach ministry proved that BBCF is a church without a mission. After the death of the late pastor, the church lost interest in outreach because they were busy fighting among themselves for leadership positions. For the past decade, BBCF has made no impact on the community. It has become a Sunday-only church. The two main ministries in the church, men's ministry and women's ministry, do not have any ministry plan. The Sunday worship service becomes a ritual for the members. The worship ministry needs prayers and ongoing work to reach the level of the church described by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16.

Despite the challenges BBCF is confronting, the need for a family-based youth biblical mentorship ministry (YBMM) is crucial for the church's survival. Family and youth ministry are intertwined because young believers are products of their homes. Developing only a family ministry without a structure to keep young people on the right track will not be beneficial to the church. It took a mentor as the apostle Paul to keep the young Timothy on par with his pastoral ministry (1 Tim 1:18-19; 2 Tim 1:1-3). Of course,

Timothy's mother and grandmother already entrusted him a faith deposit (2 Tim 1:5-14). So, a biblical mentorship ministry must be family-oriented to ensure its success.

Rationale

The contextual components delineated in the Unity of the Spirit church assessment I conducted established a case to raise questions regarding the spiritual maturity of BBCF. A telescopic view of its ministries reveals that this local church operates without a mission. If asked, many BBCF members would not know the mission of this local church in the community. Likewise, if questioning the congregation about the future of BBCF, they cannot answer because of the noticeable absence of young people in the church. The church needs to address some fundamental questions to understand the cause of teenagers' desertion from the church.

This project explores biblical approaches of Christian unity with the aim of educating believers to cultivate a worthy walk with Christ—a unified body for the work of ministry in the local church. It will also help the congregation understand the source of this unity and its need in every member's ministry.

One of the most compelling questions BBCF needs to answer is: Why does this local church exist in the community? A local church in a community represents a “hospital for the souls.” Scriptures teach that the Word of God is the only medicine that can cure the soul of all sicknesses (Heb 4:12). Christ commissioned the local church as the religious institution to administer the Word of God to people. A trustworthy hospital can be defined as a medical facility with many success stories for the care it provides to patients. Likewise, a faithful church provides proper spiritual care to its members and the lost souls in the community. If a church fails to provide spiritual care to the people in its community, then it does not honor Christ. An authentic church must pray in the Spirit to prepare the field to receive the Word. God also uses the local church to train and equip believers to do ministry (Eph 4:12). Faithful exposition of the Word on Sunday is wonderful; however, it is not effective without a coordinated and intentional plan to

minister it. BBCF must develop a strategic plan to minister the Word to the saints. The clearer victims of that situation are teenagers. A ministry plan to train and equip young believers to profess their faith in Christ will help the church address young believers' spiritual needs. Some teenagers currently attend the Sunday morning services at BBCF because they are compelled to obey their parents. A church that does not minister to all its members does not honor Christ.

Besides the reason for its existence in the community, BBCF needs to assess its current ministry structure. Does the church have a system to accomplish its ministries? The vision of BBCF is myopic at best. It does not have a structure in place to help the church achieve the work of ministry. BBCF must design new ministries with a culture focused on disciple-making, which in turn will stimulate a worthy walk with Christ. In his approach of culture change in the church, Tony Payne states, "You can't change the culture by working on the culture because culture is a description of what you have become."⁴ It will take time to create this new culture in the church. However, once started, it will generate a new set of core beliefs, structures, and systems that will set the church on the right track with a mission to glorify God. The best way to equip church members is to teach them to be obedient to God's Word by being doers of the Word (Jas 1:22-23).

The church must also consider educating its members on the practice of discipleship within the home because the first area for believers to demonstrate a worthy walk with Christ is the home. Disciple-making must be a lifestyle for Christians to nurture and foster spiritual health. Practical disciple-making within the home must be part of the Christian's life. Timothy Paul Jones points out that the family must be one in which the

⁴ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project* (Youngstown, OH: Matthias, 2016), 316, Kindle.

gospel is central to every facet of life.⁵ How well one makes disciples in the home is a vital question that needs a direct answer from every Christian.

The third and final question concerns unity of the body. Is BBCF a united congregation? In addition to lacking a system to help the church accomplish ministry work, there is also a problem of unity in the church. Several indices show that BBCF is not a unified body. BBCF is not united in how it does ministry. The ministries in the church have operated in isolation and without supervision for over four years. This current practice of ministry at BBCF creates confusion in the church, and consequently, the ministries have declined considerably.

Moreover, it seems that the church does not understand the concept of unity. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the local church in Ephesus, urges them to maintain the unity of the Spirit. The basis of Paul's call for this unity is the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The church as a body is one in the Spirit (Eph 4:4-6). The *Holman Illustrated Dictionary* defines *unity* as "the state of being undivided; having oneness; a condition of harmony."⁶ BBCF does not take advantage of various gifts that exist in the congregation. Believers are eager to exercise their gifts in the church; however, self-interest suppresses them. For instance, those who have the gift of stewardship work in other ministries that are entirely unrelated to their gifts.

As a result of the misalignment of gifts in church ministries, the body becomes unbalanced, and the ministries suffer. A training course on spiritual gifts will benefit both BBCF leadership and congregants. For a church to be united, it needs to have one faith and agree on the distribution of gifts in one Spirit. BBCF also needs to understand that unity is not uniformity. Some members do not have a good understanding of spiritual

⁵ Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2011), 463.

⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2003), s.v. "unity."

gifts in the church. They believe that being part of the church's leadership is the best way to exercise one's gift.

The work of ministry belongs to all Christians. The body of Christ must understand that the work of ministry is not synonymous to leadership. God calls and places believers in the church with different gifts. For instance, those with gifts of shepherding and teaching must exercise these gifts to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12). Ephesians 4:1-16 might serve as a reference text to teach believers what it means to be a unified body. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul expounds to believers the meaning of the work of ministry (Rom 12:6-8). Together with the text in 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, the two passages can be used concurrently to help BBCF members understand the nature of a unified body.

Besides the misunderstanding of the distribution of gifts, BBCF is not united in mutual respect of each other's point of view. When a brother has a different opinion on a specific subject, he is regarded as an enemy. Believers do not understand that each member of the body is unique, and it is the work of the Lord. The congregation must engage in mutual respect because it is one body in Christ. Members must reject any divergence driven by self-interest or selfish ambition. In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul depicts Christ's humility to decipher the behavior of a Christian when there is a divergence in the body (Phil 2:1-11).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train members of Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to cultivate intergenerational unity within their families and the congregation.

Goals

The following four goals depict the project's means to accomplish its purpose. The first goal focused on the current understanding and practices of unity among the

believers at BBCF. The second and third goals educated members on Christ-centered biblical unity in the life of a New Testament local church. The fourth goal was to ensure understanding and practices of Christ-centered biblical unity among present and future members of BBCF.

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of biblical unity among BBCF members.
2. The second goal was to develop a twelve-week sermon series and lessons on the biblical unity of the New Testament local church.
3. The third goal was to increase the knowledge of Christ-centered biblical unity among BBCF members.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to sustain the understanding and practices of a Christ-centered biblical unity at BBCF.

Definitive research methodology measured when these four goals were accomplished. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal is detailed in the next section.

Research Methodology

Four goals determined the success of this project. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of biblical unity among BBCF members. This goal was measured by administering the Believer Biblical Unity Inventory (BBUI)⁷ to at least one hundred and fifty members of different age groups in the congregation.⁸ Both adults and youths were surveyed on biblical unity understanding and practices. Each participant received an electronic copy of the survey. For those who were not computer savvy, a hard copy was provided. This goal was considered successfully met when at least one hundred and thirty participants (adult and youth) completed the BBUI, the

⁷ See appendix 2. All research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

⁸ The average attendance at BBCF on Sunday's morning is about 250. More than 190 of those are adult members.

inventory was analyzed, and the results yielded a clearer picture of the current biblical unity practices among BBCF members.

The second goal was to develop a twelve-week sermon series and lessons on the biblical unity of the New Testament local church. For this goal I preached a sermon series on Sunday mornings to the entire congregation as part of the worship service. This sermon series focused on developing Christ-centered, biblical unity-minded, believers. Project participants were required to attend at least nine of the twelve weekly sermons in the series. In addition to the twelve-week sermon series, twelve weekly lessons on Christ-centered biblical unity were taught to members who committed to the project. This course occurred on Sunday morning during the Sunday school hour before the worship service. The class format was interactive, where participants could ask questions and have their questions answered or put on the floor for discussion. This goal was measured by an expert panel of three pastors and two lay members—one man and one woman.

Three criteria were used for the pastors to form this panel: they must (1) be members of the Gulfstream Baptist Association of the Florida Baptist Convention; (2) have at least ten years of experience in preaching; and (3) have a doctorate in theology. The lay members had to be members of BBCF for at least five years. This expert panel used a rubric to evaluate the sermon series' biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance and the course materials.⁹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 95 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase the knowledge of a Christ-centered biblical unity among BBCF members. This goal was measured by a post-survey, which was used to measure the change in understanding and practices of biblical unity among BBCF members. The BBUI was re-administered to participants two weeks after completing the

⁹ See appendices 4 and 5.

sermon series and lessons.¹⁰ Each participant received an electronic copy of the survey. For those who were not computer savvy, a hard copy was provided. This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for at least one hundred and thirty dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant improvement in the pre-and post-BBUI survey scores.

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to sustain the understanding and practices of a Christ-centered biblical unity at BBCF. Members who completed the twelve-week sermon series and lessons on biblical unity in the local church had the opportunity to mentor new converts and new members who will make BBCF their local church. This goal was measured by the deacons, who utilized a rubric to evaluate the plan's functionality, communication process, training elements, provision of discipleship resources, and action steps.¹¹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level and the deacons have endorsed the plan.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

Specific key terms used in this ministry project are defined in this section to facilitate the reader's understanding of the subject.

Youth. For the purpose of this project, *youth* are defined as people between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine.¹² *Youth* covers people in their teenage and young adult years. Several international organizations use different age brackets to define youth. For instance, the United Nations defines *youth* as a period of transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence. For statistical purposes, the secretariat of the

¹⁰ See appendix 2. The post-series survey was accepted from participants who also completed the pre-series survey and followed at least ten sessions.

¹¹ See appendix 4.

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), s.v. "youth."

United Nations establishes the age bracket for youth as people from the age of 15 to 24.¹³ While I value the United Nations findings, the age bracket of 13 to 29 is more appropriate because nowadays because adolescents emerge sooner to the adulthood stage and live longer with their parents.

Young people. Many terms have been used to define young adults between the ages of 18 to 30. *Young people* is the primary term used in this project. Occasionally, the term *youth* is used in place of young people when the time covers teenagers and young adults alike.

Intergenerational unity. *Intergenerational unity* champions the thriving of all generations in the work of ministry. It removes segregated barriers that exist between different generations in the community of faith. Jones values this ministry model because of the interaction of other age groups and the priority it places on the home for spiritual formation.¹⁴

Christ-centered biblical unity. *Christ-centered biblical unity* is based on union with the triune God in Christ. The apostle Paul uses the human body metaphor to describe this union (Eph 4:4). Stephen Wellum rightly puts it when he states that Christ's work becomes ours by virtue of our new-covenant union in him.¹⁵ A *Christ-centered biblical unity* follows Christ's sacrificial love and humility (Phil 2:2-4; 2 Cor 5:11-17).

Three delimitations were placed on this project. First, the project was limited to one hundred and fifty participants to allow enough time for data processing and

¹³ "United Nations Youth Definition", Organization, Definition of Youth, n. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines "youth," as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. The Secretary-General first referred to the current definition of youth in 1981 in his report to the General Assembly on International Youth Year (A/36/215, paras. 8 of the annex) and endorsed it in ensuing reports (A/40/256, 19 of the annex), accessed January 5, 2019, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

¹⁴ Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide*, 48.

¹⁵ Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone. The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, The 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 266.

analysis after the post-survey. Second, only members of BBCF were allowed to participate in this project.¹⁶ Third, the timeframe for completing the sermons series and lessons was twelve consecutive weeks. The twelve-week sermon series and lessons were by no means exhaustive to educate the congregation on all aspects of a Christ-centered unity. However, it undoubtedly elevated the assembly to a progressive Christ-centered biblical unity understanding and practices at BBCF.

Conclusion

God has bestowed connate gifts upon believers to help the church do the work of ministry effectively and in unity. The local church expresses this unity in its functional characteristics by teaching believers to live a life worthy of their calling. It must also equip the saints for the work of ministry, promote diversity among members for mutual service, monitor the spiritual progress of believers to attain a Christlike stature, and mentor new believers to honor Christ in their lives in unity in the local church.

Chapter 2 will lay out scriptural support for why the church needs to cultivate a worthy walk with Christ as a unified body through scriptural exegesis of several biblical passages. Chapter 3 will focus on the practical aspect of cultivating intergenerational unity in the church and at home. Several studies and research will provide significant acumen for intentional Christ-centered biblical unity understanding and practices at BBCF.

¹⁶ BBCF members are those who have accepted Christ as their personal Savior, have been baptized, and joined the membership.

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE PRESENTS A NEW TESTAMENT LOCAL CHURCH AS THE ONE THAT BELIEVERS CULTIVATE A WORTHY WALK WITH CHRIST AS A UNIFIED BODY

Scripture presents the New Testament local church as a unified body where believers cultivate a worthy walk with Christ. To foster unity, believers must relentlessly seek to understand how the body of Christ—the church—interrelates with the triune God. The unity of the triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—is real; therefore, the unity of the body of Christ must be real. To expose the integrity of this syllogism, several passages of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians will be considered. Each text will bring its own contribution to help believers understand the unity of the Spirit.

The church is a living organism. As such, each member of the body of Christ must eagerly work to maintain the unity of the Spirit among themselves and in the body as a whole. A proper understanding of the concept of unity in the church is vital for the body of Christ to function effectively as per Christ's design (Matt 16:17, 18; 28:18-20). This chapter focuses on believers' education on the source of their unity and their embodiment of this unity. It further explores some foundational steps believers need to take to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The Source of Believers' Calling (Eph 1:3-10)

Believers cultivate a worthy walk with Christ when they understand the source of their calling. An exegesis of Ephesians 1:3-10 will show that God is the eternal source of believers' calling. The church in Ephesus did not need correction in a specific problematic area in their walk with Christ as it was the case, for instance, of the

Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10). However, while in prison, Paul felt the need to educate the Ephesians to esteem their identity in Christ highly. Clinton Arnold believes that Paul wrote his letter of encouragement to the Ephesians “exclusively for the Christians community and not for outsiders.”¹ Note that Paul’s greeting to the Ephesians is directed to the “saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (1:1). The faithfulness of the Ephesians gives Paul boundless joy. The excitement of the incarcerated apostle cannot go unnoticed in this text.

An Ovation of Praise

After a brief introduction and greeting to the “saints who are in Ephesus,” Paul excitingly acclaims the unsurpassed grace of God through all “spiritual blessings” that he bestows on believers. This shout of acclamation abridges the overflowing joy of believers’ hearts that carry their expression of thanksgiving for God’s favors toward them. In Ephesians 1:3, the Greek Word for the exclamation of praise (εὐλογητός) stresses the overwhelming joy that believers ought to experience for their salvation in Christ. Paul opens the first paragraph by addressing God instead of describing the church’s needs in Ephesus because, by addressing God directly, Paul invites believers to join him in giving praise with thanksgiving for God’s proactive role in believers’ foreordained salvation (v. 4). This invitation bears a great acclamation of the holiness of God. It resounds the shout of praises of believers for the infinite “spiritual blessings” that the Lord graciously imparts to them in Christ. It is also an appeal to believers to celebrate with praise the immeasurable and “glorious grace” of God (v. 6).

First Peter 1:3 is a parallel text in the New Testament that features the same kind of εὐλογητός that Paul uses in this passage. For Peter, εὐλογητός is a shout of praise to God for his “great mercy” in his work of regeneration of believers. As described by Paul in Ephesians 1:1-10, the result of regeneration is an act of God. Paul believes that

¹ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 22.

the resultant benefit of the immeasurable grace of God deserves an ovation of praises. Believers must express their gratitude toward the “God and Father of *their* Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3).

Numerous texts in the Old Testament recount the use of the εὐλογητός by the people of God to glorify him for the blessings he bestows on them (2 Chr 2:12; Pss 28:6; 31:21; 41:13; 66:20). Clinton points out, “This manner of expression is Jewish and can be seen throughout the OT and Jewish literature, where the Hebrew term *bārak* is frequently used in these ascriptions of praise.”²

Again, immediately after greeting the church’s saints in Ephesus (Eph 1:1), Paul opens the chapter with an exclamation of praises to God (Eph 1:2). The clamor of praises serves as a doxology for the work God has done in Christ. Moreover, Christ’s work on the cross is for the sake of believers’ salvation. Instead of using a proper form of the Greek verb εὐλογέω (to praise), Paul uses its derivative adjective εὐλογητός (praise). The use of *eulogētos* implies that God is worthy of all praises in Heaven and on earth. Therefore, believers ought to speak well of God and celebrate him with praises. Paul goes on to position God and gives two reasons why God is worthy of praises: He is (1) the θεός (God) who created the heavens and the earth and all things that existed (Gen 1:1; Rev 4:11); and (2) the “Πατήρ” (Father) of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3). When believers understand that the θεός God who created humankind is the Father (Πατήρ) of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then they will value their position in the family of God. This family association is particularly significant because outside of the defined concept of the one God and One Father—the *Theos* is the *Patēr*—it would be complex for believers to understand the molding part of their salvation “in Christ.” Every reason that Paul states in the verses after that is anchored in the term “in Christ.”

² Clinton, *Ephesians*, 77.

A Praise of Thanksgiving (v.3)

The *eulogētos* that Paul exclaims at the beginning of verse 3 is a praise of thanksgiving. This praise is the result of all the spiritual blessings God graciously bestows on believers. These spiritual blessings are not mere material blessings, but blessings that come from the ἐπουράνιος (heavenly places). The Greek word ἐπουράνιος, which is translated to “heavenly places,” must be understood as “things that take place in heaven, the abode of God and Angels.”³ God has not only blessed believers with “some” spiritual blessings but with “all” (πᾶς) spiritual blessings.

The Greek word for “every” (πᾶς) might also well be translated into English as “all” with a collective meaning.⁴ According to that definition, James Strong infers that “every spiritual blessing” may designate every spiritual blessing individually or all spiritual blessings as part of the entire spiritual blessings package of God. Thus, in every category of blessings that exist in the spiritual realm, God apportions them to believers (v. 3). The use of the Greek verb εὐλογέω (to praise) alludes to a “Jewish form of prayer known as *barakah*,” states Craig Blomberg.⁵ This *barakah* is addressed solely to God the Father. Clinton adds, “Paul thereby stresses that God of Israel has a close father-son relationship with Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶ Later in Ephesians 3, Paul delineates numerous past, present, and future benefits for which believers ought to bless God. In the second part of Ephesians 1:3 one should note the past tense of *eulogēo*, “he has blessed us.” God is the subject in that sentence, and believers are objects of the benefits. Furthermore, Paul emphasizes that every (πᾶς) spiritual blessing that God bestows on believers is in Christ ἐν Χριστῷ, his eternal beloved Son, the Lord, and Savior of believers.

³ James Strong, *A Comprehensive Strong Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Bestbooksmedia, 2015), 6549, Kindle.

⁴ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7492.

⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts through Revelation* (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 308.

⁶ Clinton, *Ephesians*, 78.

Paul also uses the noun “Lord” instead of “Savior” in his acclamation of praise to God. Clinton believes that the use of “κύριος” (Lord) communicates “the central point of the blessing.”⁷ It is noteworthy that the name *Kurios* expresses believers’ possession of Christ. The possessive case in the expression (κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) suggests that believers are under the lordship of Christ. According to Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida, *Kurios* is “a title for God and Christ. One who exercises supernatural authority over humankind.”⁸ Believers must understand that Jesus Christ has supreme authority over them. The supreme authority of Christ encapsulates every (πᾶς) spiritual blessing that believers receive from God the Father.

Paul further expounds on the blessings that God apportions to believers by adding the adjective “spiritual” (πνευματικῆ) as a modifier to the noun “blessings” (εὐλογία) to describe the kind of benefits believers receive from God. The adjective πνευματικῆ describes the type of blessings God bestows on believers. These benefits are not mere earthly blessings, but they come from the heavenly realms. The Greek word for “heavenly realms” (ἐπουρανόις) has twenty occurrences in the New Testament, and it has been translated sixteen times as “heavenly realms or heavenly places.”⁹ It also implies that these blessings are manufactured in Heaven, “the abode of God and angels.”¹⁰ Believers must further understand that the Holy Spirit is the guarantor and facilitator of their spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:13-14; 4:30). He is the one who helps bring about these blessings in the life of believers (2 Cor 1:22). In verse 4, Paul presents God’s choice as the basis of all spiritual gifts that God lavishes on believers.

⁷ Clinton, *Ephesians*, 78.

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 139.

⁹ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3.

¹⁰ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6549.

God's Choice (v. 4)

One of the spiritual blessings that God bestows on believers is the choice that he made of them. Paul's didactical approach in the opening of verse 4, "even as he chose us in him [Christ]" (καθώς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ), signals that Jesus Christ is the molding pot of God's choice of believers. The term "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ) implies that God has appointed Jesus Christ as the only agent of believers' salvation. Jesus Christ is the instrument God uses to achieve believers' adoption as sons. The Greek verb (ἐκλέγομαι) that Paul uses to describe the process of election of believers implies that God picked believers from among a multitude and set them apart to be his own through faith in Christ. The ground of believers' choice is Christ and his merits only. By the divine decree—the "eternal plan by which God has rendered certain all the event of the universe, past, present, and future"¹¹—God laid down the law for his purpose of believers' election. God graciously granted them a unique privilege of being set apart in Christ for a particular purpose according to his will (Eph 1:5). God's choice, therefore, has two aspects that provide necessary assistance to believers' understanding of the source of their calling: the privilege and the purpose of their choice.

The Privilege of Being Chosen

First, the privilege of believers' choice by God goes beyond human reasoning and understanding. Believers' choice is not a reactionary act of God after the fall but an eternal plan with a purpose. The infinitive (εἶναι), in the sentence "that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:4), formulates the reason for the choice of believers. Also, God has the will and the means to bring out what he determined before the foundation of the world (Isa 14:24, 27). He chose believers in Christ to be part of the spiritual family before the conception of the world (Eph 1:4; Gal 4:4-5). The Greek prepositional phrase (πρὸ καταβολῆς), which is translated in English "before the

¹¹ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, 2015), 209.

foundation,” carries the meaning of “a throwing or laying down of a foundation.”¹² It also implies that before implementing the design layout of the world, God chose believers to be his own in Christ.

The Greek word *καταβολή* further carries the meaning “before the conception”—forming notions or ideas of the world. God selected believers to be his own in Christ before forming notions of the world. God made this choice specifically in his eternal Son, Jesus Christ. The term “in him” (*ἐν αὐτῷ*) is critical for a deeper understanding of the process of believers’ choice. God’s eternal love for the Son, Jesus Christ, is the rationale for believers’ choice. Klyne Snodgrass asserts, “Christ is the ‘place’ where believers reside, the source in which they find God’s salvation and blessings.”¹³ It is also noteworthy that believers understand that God’s children are substantive from eternity past, present, and future. Believers’ choice to be part of the family of God has been secured eternally in Christ. Thus, the identity of believers is not earthly but heavenly.

Second, the privilege of believers’ choice is rooted in the eternal predisposition of the sovereign God. The aorist indicative of the verb “to choose” (*ἐκλέγομαι*) reinforces the idea that God eternally willed to create a people to be part of his eternal kingdom. God’s predilection is an enormous aspect of the outlook of believers’ position in Christ. Therefore, believers’ identity is eternally anchored in God’s beloved Son, Jesus Christ. This choice is nonetheless a special grace of God from his sovereignty. God could have done otherwise, but he graciously favored believers in Christ. The reason why God chose believers is none other than his love. It is not believers’ meritorious acts that motivate God to choose them to be part of his family. Believers are called to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29). They are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name

¹² Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6852.

¹³ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 47.

of Jesus to be Holy and without blemish before God (1 Cor 6:11).

Purpose of Believers' Choice

Besides the privilege of being chosen, believers must understand that God has an eternal purpose for choosing them. God's purpose for the believer's choice has a twofold aim.

Choose to be holy. First, God chose believers to be "holy" (ἅγιος) because holiness is his nature. Scripture refers to God as the "Holy One" thirty-nine times in the Old Testament and four times in the New Testament. When Moses first encountered God in Horeb, the Lord expressly warned him of the holiness of his realm: "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exod 3:5). Holiness is the supreme glory of God. All attributes of God derive from his holiness. Therefore, the purity of his holiness creates the eternal and perfect standard that ought to follow by humankind. The text in Psalms 29:2 clarifies the splendor of the holiness of God. David cries out, "Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name," and invites believers to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." David's statement strikingly portrays the perfection of the holiness of God. Charles Spurgeon believes that the "element of beauty in God is the combination of his various attributes in one harmonious whole."¹⁴

Choose to be blameless. Second, the choice of believers requires that they live a blameless life before God. The Greek word ἄμωμος (without blame) carries the same meaning as the Hebrew word *tamiyim* (without blemish). Scriptures use the term "without blemish" to describe the Passover lamb that was necessary to protect the children of Israel against God's judgment of the Egyptians (Exod 12:5-14). The author of Hebrews delineates that the blood of Christ, the "unblemished Lamb" (ἄμωμος), secures the redemption of believers (9:14). Christ offers himself to God as the Lamb without

¹⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *Collections of Commentary on the Psalms of David* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), Psalms 27:4, Kindle.

blemish so that believers can meet the blamelessness requirement. Believers' holiness and blamelessness are gracious acts of God in Christ. The blood of Christ empowers believers to live a life in accord with God's holiness. Christ's blood also "purifies believers' conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14). The holiness of God requires a people of his own to serve him. According to Peter, God's chosen people are called "to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5).

Believers' Adoption (v. 5)

God's plan to make believers a people of his own was not an afterthought but a plan that existed before the initial concept of the creation. Ephesians 1:5 fuses adoption and predestination in God's plan to have a "people to his own." Paul asserts that God "predestines believers for adoption to himself." The verb "predestine" (*προορίζω*) used in verse 5 implies that God has decided beforehand from eternity past that believers should be his sons and daughters by adoption in Christ. It was God's good pleasure to share his love with the elected ones in Christ.

The mechanism of believers' sonship is "through Christ." There is no sonship outside of Christ as the molding part for believers' adoption. The term "through Christ" (*διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*) implies that Christ is the intermediate agent of God's adoption of believers. Christ is also the ground of believers' adoption by the sovereign God. Believers become part of God's family because of his love for Christ. Therefore, the causative agent for God's adoption is Christ himself.

Believers' Sonship and God's Will

In his eternal plan, God wills to share the love that the triune God experiences eternally among themselves. He therefore decreed to adopt believers as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ to execute his plan. God did not compel to grant sonship favor to believers, but it was an act of the good pleasure of his will. God was pleased to

bestow his superabundant love to believers through Christ. The superabundance act of adoption manifested according to the purpose of his choice. The word *will*, which comes from the Greek's word *θέλημα*, is mainly used in the Scripture as an act of God. It is what God has determined beforehand that shall be done. It is a choice that God has made. Furthermore, the will of God guarantees the carrying out of believers' sonship. The act of adoption has a twofold aim: the good pleasure of God's will—His glory and the praise of his glorious grace.

God's glory. God delighted when he adopted believers as sons through Jesus Christ. Scripture states that God's decision to adopt believers was decreed "according to the purpose of his will" (Eph 1:5). The word *purpose*, which comes from the Greek word *εὐδοκία*, carries the meaning of great pleasure in the New Testament. According to Louw and Nida, it is "that which pleases someone."¹⁵ The purpose, therefore, of God's election of believers is the delight of his disposition. Clinton contends, "The good pleasure of his [God's] will, then, is the 'basis of' [*κατά*] his election" of believers.¹⁶ God's predilection for believers' choice is rooted in his sovereignty and love for Christ. God's love for believers is an overflow of his love for Christ. Because Christ is the perfect "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), believers are to "be conformed to the image of his [beloved] son" (Rom 8:29).

Believers must understand that God's glory is uncompromising and inalterable. God testifies before men his joy in his beloved Son when he declares, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Therefore, believers' adoption is an act of God for his "own sake" (Isa 48:11). Christ, thus, is the membrane in which believers are encapsulated to protect God's holiness and the sharing of his love.

Praise of God's glorious grace (v. 6). The sonship of believers results from

¹⁵ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6589.

¹⁶ Clinton, *Ephesians*, 83.

God's good pleasure to carry out his eternal desire and the celebration of his glorious grace. In other words, the ultimate purpose of God's adoption of believers is for his glory. The kind of praise Paul mentions in Ephesians 1:6 comes from the Greek word *ἔπαινος*, which is translated into English "commendation." This term is used eleven times in the New Testament. It is also noteworthy that the meaning "commendation" that ascribes to *ἔπαινος* in the text is unique to Paul. This "laudation" aims to refocus believers' attention on the majestic God. It also helps believers capture the fullness of God's "glorious grace" in their praise. The word "grace" (*χάρις*) carries in the New Testament the meaning of "goodwill, loving-kindness, and favor." It is used in this text to emphasize the merciful kindness of God in believers' salvation. The "grace" that God bestows upon believers is not a mere favor but a "glorious grace." Believers, therefore, are to acclaim God for such marvelous grace. Furthermore, the Greek Word for "glorious" (*δόξα*), which carries the meaning "magnificence" in the New Testament, is used as a modifier to highlight the superiority of God's grace.

Believers' Redemption (v. 7a)

Moreover, this grace is distinctive and comes only from the supreme and absolute Holy God. The same love that God bestows on his eternal Son, Jesus Christ, overflows unto believers to manifest his grandeur in them. Paul uses the same root of the Greek word (*χάρις*) to express the kind of blessing God vested on believers in the "Beloved." Jesus Christ is the eternal beloved Son of God. During Jesus's baptism, God utterly declared the identity of the Son (Matt 3:17). In Jesus Christ, believers have been redeemed. To redeem his people, God must enter a covenant with himself. In every covenant, God stipulates that the blood of the covenant breaker is required to satisfy the covenant (Gen 17:14; Exod 24:8). In the redemptive covenant, God imputes believers' sin to himself through the shedding blood of his beloved Son Jesus Christ to satisfy the covenant's stipulations (Rom 5:8).

The term *redemption* (*ἀπολύτρωσις*) carries the meaning of "buying back" in

the New Testament. The redemptive act suggests that Christ repurchased believers by paying in full the ransom for their release. Christ repurchased believers with his precious blood on the cross. This price was paid once for all and guaranteed the adoption of believers as sons and daughters. It also conveys the idea of “deliverance” from a state of bondage and captivity by remuneration. Because believers were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20), they are no longer their own, but they belong to Christ who secured their eternal redemption by “means of his own blood” (Heb 9:12). Max Anders is right when he states, “By being redeemed by Christ, we are freed from sin, both the penalty and the enslaving power.”¹⁷ Believers’ redemption further manifests progressively in their lives and makes them conform to the image of God (Rom 8:29; Col 3:10) until the complete restoration at the consummation (1 Cor 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

Believers’ Forgiveness (v. 7a)

Since the blood of Christ satisfies the penalties of sin, which is death (Rom 6:23), believers receive forgiveness for their trespasses in Christ. The term *forgiveness*, which comes from the Greek word ἀφεσις, carries the meaning of “release from bondage” in the New Testament. God grants freedom to believers by “remembering no more” their trespasses. Because the blood of Christ represents the full payment of believers’ salvation, it is the only means that believers can transfer from the kingdom of darkness to the glorious kingdom of God (Col 1:13). And this is done only “according to the riches of his [God] grace” (Eph 1:7). Believers’ salvation and forgiveness of sins result from God’s abundant grace. He can forgive believers because he is “full of grace.” According to Wayne Grudem, “God’s grace means God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.”¹⁸ God does not possess grace in him, but he is himself grace. God’s goodness toward believers

¹⁷ Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 118.

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 200.

through Christ's death for their redemption.

The Administration of God's Grace (v. 8)

Because God is full of grace, there is no shortage of divine favor toward his adopted sons and daughters. Consequently, he bestows his grace upon them bountifully. In Ephesians 1:8, the aorist indicative active of the verb *lavish* (*ἐπερίσσευσεν*) indicates an effective, once-for-all, act of God in the past. Such an act implies that the shedding blood of Jesus Christ on the cross is the source of this abundant grace. And the abundant grace is Christ himself. Believers are therefore the direct object of God's immeasurable grace. The apostle John elaborates further on this when he declares, "In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). John figuratively couples God's grace with his love to expound believers' redemption in Christ. God's grace is the root system that supports the tree of believers' redemption. God distributes his grace to believers in Christ to render them fertile and profitable for his kingdom.

God manifests his love among believers in "all wisdom and insight" (Eph 1:8). What was a mystery in the past has been revealed in Christ (Eph 1:9; 1 Pet 1:20). Believers now have a thorough knowledge of God's will in Christ. This enlightenment results from the superabundance of grace of God to believers (Rom 11:33). The mystery of God's will has been hidden since eternity past has been revealed in Christ. God's love for those he elected from eternity past has been manifested in Christ (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), who is the finished work of God for his plan of salvation.

God's Revealed Will (v. 10)

God's will aims to unite all things in Christ. The mystery of God's will was purposed in Christ as a plan for the "fullness of time." God's eternal plan, Jesus Christ, is now revealed to believers (Gal 4:4-5). The Greek word *πλήρωμα*, which is translated into

English “fullness,” can be best translated “to make complete into every particular.”¹⁹ Blomberg refers to the “fullness of time” as the “messianic age.”²⁰ The fullness of time will lead to a return to eternity. Time will no longer be a discrete element but an eternal one. It entails that God’s plan from eternity past to unite all things—Heaven and earth—in Christ will bring a state of perfection in Christ. The term *in Christ* is essential to understanding the fulfillment of God’s plan. Blomberg writes, “God’s ultimate goal [is] to restore the entire fallen, corrupt universe to its rightful submission under the lordship of Christ Jesus.”²¹ Anders accords in opinion with Blomberg when he states, “God will bring all things in heaven and earth to a fitting conclusion in Christ who will be the head or ruler of all things.”²²

Ephesians 1:10 reassures believers that God’s kingdom will be united eternally in Christ. This united kingdom will encompass all things in Heaven and on earth. The Greek word *πάντα*, which is translated into English “all things,” does not champion universalism—“the doctrine that all people will ultimately be saved,”²³ but implies a cosmic renewal—new heaven and new earth (Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). The united world can be best described as a reconciliation of “all things” in Christ because all things were created through him and for him (Col 1:16). The apostle John also states that “all things were made through him” (John 1:3). It implies that anything that came to existence originated from Christ, the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. This reconciliation is only possible through Christ’s blood, which is the agent of believers’ peace with God (Col 1:20).

¹⁹ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7595.

²⁰ Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 309.

²¹ Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 309.

²² Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, 118.

²³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1157.

Cultivation of a Worthy Walk in Christ

Believers cultivate a worthy walk when they are filled with the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. An exegesis of Ephesians 5:15-21 and Galatians 5:16-26 will show how the Spirit's work fosters a changed life.

A Circumscribed Walk (v. 15)

The work of the Holy Spirit must thoroughly control the Christian's walk in Christ. Believers must pay careful attention to the Holy Spirit's guidance in their walk. Before his death and ascension, Christ promised his disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Helper (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit would be their guide and would accompany them in their spiritual journey on earth (John 14:16-17, 26). "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come," declares Jesus (John 16:13). Christ's reassuring words on the coming of the Helper strengthen the disciples' faith. Believers, therefore, must know that they are not alone in their walk with Christ.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the only one who can declare the truth to believers. The Greek word translates into "truth" is ἀλήθεια, and often carries a collective meaning of saying "what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man."²⁴ The Holy Spirit is the only person responsible for revealing to believers what is true of God's will because he speaks on Jesus's behalf (John 16:13).

Most importantly, the Holy Spirit dwells in believers' lives and enables them to know God's will (John 14:17). His presence kindles their hearts to seek to know God more. The Holy Spirit also empowers believers of everything they need to have a "worthy walk" with Christ. He also guides believers in all truth. It is worth noting that Jesus did not say that the Holy Spirit will guide *them* in the truth, but rather, the Holy Spirit will guide *them* in *all truth*. Although the same Greek word ἀλήθεια is used for "Spirit of

²⁴ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 5651.

truth,” it is evident here that “*πᾶσα ἀλήθεια*” refers to the revelation of God’s Word “all the truth” (John 16:13). Therefore, believers possess the knowledge of discerning the truth of the Word of God when they let the Holy Spirit lead them. As a counselor, the Spirit guides believers’ every step in their walk with Christ. The work of the Spirit is not merely soteriological—which saves believers from the bondage of sin; on the contrary, it is advisory—the Spirit helps believers decipher the true meaning of the Word of God.

Paul’s recommendation to “look carefully then how you walk” (Eph 5:15) does not advocate for a personal effort, but rather a disposition of believers to let the Holy Spirit control their lives. The Greek construction of *βλέπετε οὖν πῶς ἀκριβῶς περιπατεῖτε* indicates a command. The present active imperative mode *βλέπετε* suggests a solid appeal to the believers’ disposition to live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16).

Essentially, Paul argues that believers must be willing to surrender their lives to the Holy Spirit if they desire to walk a “circumscribed walk” with Christ. Paul’s command “to walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) is a general and timeless precept that every believer must practice in their walk with Christ. The Holy Spirit guides believers who surrender their will to him. When Paul asks believers to look carefully, he urges them to take heed and pay careful attention to their walk (Eph 5:15). The work of the Holy Spirit requires believers’ collaboration. A receptive heart is necessary for the Holy Spirit to work effectively in believers’ life.

The Guidance of the Holy Spirit

According to Jesus, the primary role of the Holy Spirit is to “guide believers in all truth” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is always prompt to counsel believers in their walk with Christ. The wise believer pays attention to the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul admonishes believers to be wise in their walk with Christ. The Greek word for “wise” is *σοφός*, which carries the meaning of a skilled and cultivated person. A wise person is prudent and acts with purity and integrity. Louw and Nida describe the verb “wise”

(σωφρονέω) as “to have sound judgment.”²⁵ Spiritually cultivated believers seek to act under the influence of the Spirit in all practical matters. Wise believers are the ones who develop ears to the teaching of the Holy Spirit and their decision-making is fully controlled by the Spirit. This is the kind of wisdom that the Holy Spirit teaches believers to walk circumspectly.

Second Peter 1:3 teaches believers that “God has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.” Peter asserts that the Holy Spirit imparts believers all the knowledge they need to live a life according to their calling. The verb “to grant” (δωρέομαι) carries the meaning “to bestow gratuitously” in the New Testament. This knowledge is freely given to believers to guide their walk with Christ. It also empowers them to be wise in their daily decision-making.

In his work on the Spirit and the people of God, Gordon Fee shows that “God is not just saving individuals and preparing them for heaven; rather, he is creating a people among whom he can live and who in their life together will reproduce God’s life and character.”²⁶ The reproduction of God’s character is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit. As the “Paraclete” (παράκλητος), the Holy Spirit enlightens believers on the righteousness of God. He also illuminates them on the devil’s work (John 16:11; Col 2:15). Furthermore, the Spirit reminds believers that Christ destroyed the deceiver’s power on the cross. The Holy Spirit is not only believers’ advocate and counselor, but he is also their teacher. The Spirit bears the responsibility of teaching believers the Word of God. He continuously guides believers to obey God’s word to “be holy and blameless before him.” The influencing effect of the Holy Spirit in regenerated people produces an enjoyable relationship with God. When the Spirit of truth guides believers, they enjoy tremendous blessings and an intimate relationship with God.

²⁵ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 384.

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 66.

Plenitude of the Holy Spirit

Indeed, two of Jesus' disciples experienced this startling enlightenment on the road to Emmaus. Their conversation with Jesus regarding the death of Christ shows great concern in their minds. They walked with Jesus, talked to Jesus, and even preached Jesus about himself, but they could not recognize him. Then, their eyes became open and they recognized Jesus only after he took the bread, broke it, and gave it to them (Luke 24:13-31). The sharing of the bread—the body of Christ (Matt 26:26), entails the transmission of the Spirit of truth to these two disciples. In addition, Jesus' declaration in John 6:51 supports the notion of granting the Holy Spirit to these two disciples. The bread of life, Jesus Christ, is the *Revealer* of divine truth. He is the Word of God (John 1:1) in whom all truth abides.

Ephesians 5:18 presents a striking twofold admonition to believers in their walk with Christ. The first part of admonition teaches believers what they ought not to practice in their walk. Believers who live an intoxicated life identify themselves with unsaved people. Unlike a life of debauchery, believers must walk in a life filled with the Holy Spirit. Gregg Allison describes some “key interpretive elements” in Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians to pursue the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their lives. First, Allison appeals to the imperative mood. Paul’s admonition is not a mere exhortation, but rather a command. Second, he follows with the present tense, which helps believers understand that this command must have an ongoing effect in their lives. Last, the passive voice makes it clear that it is not a “call for action on the part of Christians,” but a call for “receptivity.”²⁷ Allison continues, “The expected or intended response to this command is for Christians to yield to the Holy Spirit, to be controlled—pervaded or permeated—by the Spirit in all their ways, to consciously place themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit moment

²⁷ Gregg R. Allison, “Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 15.

by moment.”²⁸ Allison’s interpretative key elements brilliantly convey the imagery of the phrase *being filled with the Spirit* that Paul commands to believers (Eph 5:18).

A Life Regulated by the Holy Spirit

Believers yield to the Holy Spirit when they open the ears of their hearts to receive instructions. Christians must train their ears to be receptive to the Word of God. Their ears must have a spiritual filter constructed with a specific frequency bandwidth—the effectual grace of God—to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ statement in John 3:6 sheds light on the imagery of this *spiritual filter* when he declares, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” To hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, one must be a born-again Christian. The true believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). The seal of the Holy Spirit is the mark believers receive to identify them as children of God.

When believers yield to the Holy Spirit, they are trained to live a life in an authentic community. The flow of love to one another demonstrates their abandonment of the Holy Spirit. The original meaning of the word abandonment, in the late fourteenth century, conveys the notion of “giving up absolutely.”²⁹ Believers must surrender their whole person (body, soul, and mind) to the Holy Spirit. They must also understand that flesh and blood cannot please God (1 Cor 15:50).

Paul urges believers to “walk by the Spirit” to protect them from having delight in the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). The Greek terms behind “walk by the Spirit” are *πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε*, which expresses a command similar to Paul’s command in Ephesians 5:18. The Hebrew meaning for the Greek word “*περιπατέω*” is “to live, conduct one’s self, regulate one’s life.”³⁰ Therefore, the exhortation implies that the Holy

²⁸ Allison, “Baptism with and Filling of the Holy Spirit,” 15.

²⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), s.v. “abandonment.”

³⁰ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7539.

Spirit must regulate the life of believers. Unlike a life controlled by the Spirit, the desire of the flesh cannot please God. The Holy Spirit must also control believers' conduct. In Galatians 2:20, Paul exclaims, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." In this statement, Paul nullifies his carnal life and magnifies his new life in Christ. The believer's new life must reflect Jesus' life in its entirety.

Commenting on Paul's command to the Galatians to "walk in the Spirit," Maxie Dunnam suggests that "the Spirit is the supreme energizing and regulative force" of believers. He further states, "The Spirit is the daily sustaining, inspiring, and guiding power of the Christian's life."³¹ The Holy Spirit regulates believers' lives to repudiate the desires of the flesh, which are always in opposition to the desires of the Spirit. He also teaches believers God's expectations for their *peripatēo* in all aspects of their lives. On his side, Fee declares, "As the renewed presence of God, the Spirit, having given life to his people, now leads them in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."³²

Note that the Greek construction of the word "righteousness" (*δικαιοσύνη*) comes from the term *δίκαιος* that refers to a person "observing divine laws."³³ Therefore, *dikaioṣunē* is the condition acceptable to God. Such believers manifest conditions "whose way of thinking, feeling, acting is wholly conformed to the Word of God."³⁴ The Holy Spirit empowers believers to mirror God's righteousness in their lives. The passage of Galatians 5:16–26 is particularly essential for the practical life of believers. Paul calls on believers to "keep in step with the Spirit" because this is the only way it will become evident that they are living by the Spirit.

³¹ Maxie D. Dunnam, *Galatians-Philemon*, The Preacher's Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 107.

³² Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 99.

³³ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6202.

³⁴ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6203.

Understanding the Will of God (Eph 5:17)

Scripture warns believers of a mindless walk in their spiritual journey. On the contrary, they must seek to “understand what the will of the Lord is” in their lives (Eph 5:17). Wise believers always seek to understand the will of God because they walk in the Spirit. When believers walk in the Spirit they are “filled with the Spirit.” The phrase *to be filled* deserves special attention because many Christians incorrectly use it when they worship the Lord. The Greek word *πληρόω*, which means “to cause to abound and make complete in everything,”³⁵ carries the meaning of a life that the Spirit wholly controls. Snodgrass asserts, “The call to be filled with the Spirit is a call to live in unity *with the triune God* and to enjoy the wholeness of life with God.”³⁶ When believers are filled with the Spirit, their hearts are full of praise for the Lord. They glorify God not only with their lips but also in their walk. Paul’s command to believers to walk circumspectly aims to a practical aspect of the Christian’s life: submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

A Walk in Wisdom

Believers who walk in light become wise and consequently walk in wisdom. They redeem the time because of their ability to discern the will of God. They continuously walk in conformity to the Word of God. They keep the Holy Spirit active in their lives because they submit to his guidance and teachings (John 14:26). Believers voluntarily submit to the teachings and control of the Spirit of truth so they gain the most in-depth knowledge of the will of God (Prov 1:7; 9:10). They follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance in every aspect of their lives. One should consider Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, for example. Luke reports, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit . . . was led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1). The transformative power of the fullness of the Spirit in Jesus enabled him to rebuke the deceiver and cast him out of his presence (Matt 4:10).

³⁵ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7594.

³⁶ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 290, emphasis added.

Consequently, believers who walk in wisdom are filled with the Holy Spirit. The filling with the Holy Spirit is a distinct mark in the sphere of believers' spiritual wisdom. Believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit obediently accept the guidance of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowers them to discern the will of God, obey him in every facet of their lives, and serve him with joy in all circumstances. A. W. Tozer states, "Only the Spirit of the Holy One can impart to the human spirit the knowledge of the holy."³⁷ Spirit-filled believers let the Word of God dwell in their hearts (Ps 119:11; Col 3:16). They willingly submit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit to cleanse them of all impurities, give them an edifying heart to glorify God, and preserve them against sinful behaviors. Anders rightly declares, "*When believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, they can determine God's will and serve him faithfully in moral living.*"³⁸

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit continuously monitors the thought process of believers and renders them capable of deciphering the Word of God (1 Cor 2:12-16). Only those who are filled with the Holy Spirit can interpret spiritual truths. Jesus himself declares to the disciples, "To you, it has given to know the secret of the kingdom of heaven, but to them, it has not been given" (Matt 13:11).

Finally, believers cultivate unity when they are filled with the Spirit. It is noteworthy to understand that the Holy Spirit is the only agent who can create and sustain unity among Christians. According to Paul, the role of believers is "to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Eph 4:3). The Holy Spirit empowers Spirit-filled believers with love to maintain unity in their midst (Rom 15:30; Col 1:8). In addition to the love he bestows on them, he creates a realm of believers who live in righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). In sum, when believers are filled with the Holy Spirit,

³⁷ A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy: Knowing God through His Attributes* (Zeeland, MI: Reformed Church, 2017), 78.

³⁸ Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, 217, emphasis added.

they walk in the Spirit and are led by the Spirit for an obedient life to God in Christ (Rom 8:13-14).

Walking in Unity with the Triune God

Believers cultivate a worthy walk with Christ when they walk in unity with the triune God. An exegesis of Ephesians 2:1-22 will show how each person of the Triune God unites believers.

Believers Former Walk (Eph 2:1-22)

Those who are separated from Christ remain dead in their trespasses (Eph 2:1). Christ is the catalyst that can transform the sinful corpse of believers into a living body through the mighty act of the Holy Spirit. Christ transforms not only the dead into living creatures, but through his death and resurrection he raises them up and makes them sit with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:5-6).

Because of their past identity, believers were alienated from God and his people. They lived according to the desire of the flesh—sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, etc. (Gal 5:18-21). This repugnant behavior of believers' former life is by no means an exhaustive list of their foolish desires. People who are separated from God are under the yoke of the flesh. They cannot restrain themselves from fulfilling the desires of the flesh. In their former life, believers were also strangers to the covenant of promise and had no hope (Eph 2:12).

Believers New Identity

The reconciliatory work of Christ on the cross destroyed the enmity believers had with God. They now have peace with God. Christ himself is the believer's peace (John 14:27; 16:33; Eph 2:17; Col 3:15). They are no longer enemies of God—children of wrath (Eph 2:3), but by God's grace, they now have a new position in Christ—children of God (Eph 2:19). They have been brought near to God by the redemptive work of the blood of

Christ (Isa 57:19; Eph 2:13). In Ephesians 2:12, Paul provides a list of deficiencies and their consequences in the life of former believers.

Believers' former and new position in Christ. Paul begins Ephesians 2 by reminding the believers of their past status. In their former life, they were separated from Christ (v. 12). This separation kept them away from the light (v. 8) and “they were led astray to mute idols” (1 Cor 12:2). Not only were believers separated from Christ, but they were also alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, the people of God (v. 11). The use of the present imperative of the verb “alienate” (*μνημονεύετε*) brings awareness to believers of their past life. They were excluded from the people of God because they had no right to citizenship (*πολιτεία*) in the kingdom of God.

Believers' alienation. Believers' past separation from the presence of God made them enemies and therefore disqualified them from the commonwealth of Israel. The Greek word for “commonwealth” is *πολιτεία*, which carries in the New Testament the meaning of “the rights of a citizen.”³⁹ The acquisition of citizenship grants the rights to anyone who becomes a citizen of a country. When someone holds citizenship in a country, he becomes a full member of society. Citizenship eliminates exclusions or barriers that might prevent someone from enjoying all the benefits of a particular country.

When Paul uses the term *commonwealth* of Israel, he certainly has in mind God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:1–17:14). In Ephesians 2:11, Paul refers to circumcision and uncircumcision, a term that is unique to the Abrahamic covenant. Because of their separation from Christ, believers were isolated from the children of the Abrahamic covenant. However, when they accepted the sacrifice of the cross, they benefited from the endearment of the community of faith in Christ through the promise God made to Abraham (Rom 4:13-25).

Christ's reconciliatory work. In addition to the alienation of the Gentiles—

³⁹ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7617.

believers' former identity—Paul reminds them that they were also “strangers to the covenant of promise. . . . they had no hope, and they were without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). That was an enormous disadvantage for the Gentiles because they had no relationship with God. However, something extraordinary happened to bring believers near to God (Heb 7:25; 10:19). Jesus shed his blood for their redemption and reconciled them with God the Father. As Stephen Wellum rightly puts it, “At its heart, ‘reconciliation’ means ‘to restore to friendship.’”⁴⁰ Believers' friendship with God is restored in Christ. They are no longer enemies but adopted children in Christ.

Furthermore, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ breaks the barrier of hostility between God and humankind—Jews and Gentiles alike (Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph 2:15-16). This salvific act creates a new being—from both Jews and Gentiles—by God's grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8). The hostility that existed between God and his creature has been nailed on the cross through the shedding blood of Christ. The new creation is now reconciled with God in Christ, who justified them by his blood (Rom 8:9-10). This new creature is the product of Christ's death and resurrection. Snodgrass points out, “Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection identified with and represented humanity.”⁴¹

As a result, believers do not live for themselves because they have been reshaped to take on Christ's identity (Gal 2:20). Christ's death and resurrection not only reconcile believers with God but also with one another—Jews and Gentiles. Paul argues that this reconciliation with one another is possible only because Christ's death abolishes “the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two” (Eph 2:15). Snodgrass argues, “The new being is Christ

⁴⁰ Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior*, The 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 239.

⁴¹ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 133.

himself, into which people are incorporated as his body.”⁴² Circumcised and uncircumcised believers become “one” by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:14b). They become a “new being” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:15; 4:24; Heb 8:13). With the shedding blood of Christ on the cross, God fuses both Gentiles and Jews into one new being.

Thus, the fusion into one body does not mean an amalgamation of beings who lost their distinct identities to become a uniform being, but rather an entirely new person—Christ is the new being (Eph 2:15). Believers are incorporated into Christ’s body—the church, which is the body of Christ—to form the people of God (Eph 2:19). Believers’ standing before God has nothing to see with their own merits but Christ’s merit. Believers’ union with God and other people is possible because of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone—*פִּינָא*, *pinâ*, in Hebrew, or *ἀκρογωνιαίος* in Greek—of believers’ spiritual foundation. Snodgrass makes a fascinating observation when he notes, “The repetition with ‘in’ underscores that all this union with God and other people take places in Christ.”⁴³

Believers’ former and new relationship with God. Believers’ godlessness, in the past, excluded them from God’s family. “Without God” (*ἄθεος*) refers to the absence of knowledge and worship of God. They manifested this godless nature when “they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25). However, through the saving work of the Holy Spirit in Christ, believers become a dwelling place for God (Rom 8:9; 1 John 3:24). God’s dwelling place is no longer the temple but the new being in Christ. Believers become the new temple where God resides (2 Cor 6:16). This temple does not build with human hands but with the blood of Jesus Christ. He is the foundation of the building, “the new being” on whom the whole structure lays down. He is also the cornerstone (*ἀκρογωνιαίος*) of the building, “the new being.”

⁴² Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 134.

⁴³ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 138.

Paul asserts, “Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joint together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21). Paul’s claim of believers as the new temple describes the individual believer and, more precisely, every believer in a corporate sense—the church. Paul’s repetition of “you” (ὁμεῖς), second person plural, dominates the idea of corporate believers. Snodgrass argues,

While 1 Corinthians 6:19 refers to the individual as the temple of God, usually (as here) the people are corporately God’s temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16). . . . The temple is a “holy” temple because God dwells there; it is a temple set aside by and for God. The temple is holy, and the people who make up this temple are “the holy ones,” they are set apart by and for God.

When believers understand who they are, they take the importance of their status in the world seriously. The apostle Peter reminds believers that they are chosen and owned by God to proclaim his excellencies (1 Pet 2:9). Believers are God’s representatives on earth. They represent God when they project the marvelous light they obtain in Christ by the Spirit. As God’s dwelling place, believers are called to be holy (1 Pet 1:16). Believers’ lives must be molded in Christ because he is the “new being” who makes the “new temple” acceptable for God to reside.

Believers’ relationship with the Holy Spirit. Believers obtain access to God by the Spirit. Paul is clear in verse 18 that the Holy Spirit is the liaison between God and believers. The Greek word that is translated into English “to access” is *προσαγωγή*, which has for meaning in the New Testament, “*believers* relationship with God whereby *they* are acceptable to him and have the assurance that he is favorably disposed towards them.”⁴⁴ Access is essential in life because it gives people the right to approach someone, make transactions, or enjoy opportunities. To access a foreign country, people need permission from that country. Likewise, people need to be vetted and receive clearance to meet with a head of state or a dignitary. The permission may be granted for a day or a limited time, but it gives the visitor the right to access the dignitary in question.

⁴⁴ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7691.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit is the believers' *prosagogeus*. Dunnam suggests, "The Greek word '*prosagoge*,' translated into English 'access,' is a technical term for the right of free approach into the presence of a king. . . . In the Persian royal court, there was an official called the *prosagogeus* whose function was to introduce people who desired an audience with the king."⁴⁵ Similarly, the Holy Spirit renders believers acceptable to approach the throne of the "Most High." Believers' *prosagoge* is unlimited and unrestricted. It is limitless because regenerated believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit eternally. Therefore, believers have the right to approach God in immediacy at any time (Eph 6:18). It is unrestricted because the blood of Jesus Christ grants believers access to God without an intermediary. The veil that separated believers from the "Most Holy" has been torn on the cross (Exod 26:31-33; Ps 145:18; Matt 27:51). Believers can now access the "Most Holy" through Christ in the Spirit (John 14:6; Eph 2:18; Col 1:22).

Work Earnestly to Maintain Unity in the Body of Christ (Eph 4:1-6)

Believers cultivate a worthy walk with Christ when they work earnestly to maintain unity in the body of Christ. An exegesis of Ephesians 4:1-6 will show that believers must walk in a way that maintains the Spirit's unity within the congregation.

In chapter 4, Paul addresses a vital aspect of believers' relationship with one another—unity in the Body of Christ. Paul's reader is now familiar with one of his favorite verbs, "walk," to admonish believers to live under the guidance of the Spirit. He uses the verb "to walk" (*περιπατέω*) to exhort the Galatians to "walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16). He admonishes the Romans to remind them that they are dead to sin. They must, therefore, walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4). However, in this text, Paul brings a unique perspective on believers' unity when he urges them to "walk in a manner worthy of their calling" (Eph 4:1).

⁴⁵ Dunnam, *Galatians-Philemon*, 172.

In the first three chapters of the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, he reveals to believers a great mystery—their union with Christ (2:11-22). He stresses that Gentiles and Jews are members of the same body (3:6). This revelation prepares the ground for his call to unity in chapter 4. Earlier in chapter 2, he shows that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ break the barriers between Jews and Gentiles and makes them a “new being” (v. 15). In addition to believers’ oneness in Christ, the death of Jesus Christ reconciles them with God. Those who were far from God now have access to him through Christ in the Spirit. Believers—Jews and Gentiles alike—become God’s people through the shedding blood of Christ on the cross.

Matthew Henry states, “Through the person, sacrifice, and mediation of Christ, sinners are allowed to draw near to God as a Father, and are brought with acceptance into his presence.”⁴⁶ This statement corroborates Paul’s claim that Christ brought believers near to God by his blood (Eph 2:13). Having just revealed the mystery of the gospel that believers become a “new being” in Christ and Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs and partakers of the promise in Christ (Eph 3:6), Paul seals his revelation with a prayer followed by a benediction to strengthen the faith of the believers (Eph 3:14-21).

Blomberg believes that Paul’s prayer is of empowerment to strengthen believers’ faith and grow spiritually in love for one another.⁴⁷ Consequently, the Holy Spirit must dwell in believers’ hearts to enlighten the mystery of their “new being” in Christ. They need this enlightenment to empower them to walk a “worthy walk in Christ” and strengthen their faith to maintain the “unity of the Spirit.”

A Substantiating Walk

Believers’ walk substantiates their standing in Christ. Paul makes a compelling case when he exhorts believers to walk worthily according to their calling (Eph 4:1). His

⁴⁶ Mark Water, *Parallel Commentary on the New Testament: Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, Matthew Henry* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2003), 655.

⁴⁷ Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 312-14.

first argument is the believers' oneness with Christ. When believers consider their position in Christ, they ought to live a life worthy of their calling. The *calling* Paul is referring to in this passage uses the Greek word for κλήσις, which means "vocation, or a call of the divine invitation to embrace the salvation of God."⁴⁸

Louw and Nida, on their side, define κλήσις as "the state of being called to a particular task or relation."⁴⁹ According to that definition, believers are called to profess a "worthy walk." The word *profession* or *vocation* can be synonymous as they are derived from the same Greek word, καλέω. The verb καλέω can refer to a call to "urgently invite someone to accept responsibilities for a particular task, implying a new relationship to the one who does the calling."⁵⁰ Such a calling must be understood as the effectual call of God. It is the irresistible grace of God in Christ to draw the elected ones to him. This "call" invites believers to do something that fits their new identity.

Paul's exhortation to believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called" strikingly exposes the grandeur of Yahweh, who invites believers to be part of his divine family. Believers' calling is from the "Holy One" who chose them from eternity past to be holy and blameless before him (Eph 1:4). Paul did not use an abstruse theory to appeal to believers to "walk a worthy walk in Christ," but draws his admonition from God's character itself.

Believers' calling is also an act of separation. God declares, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2). Believers' walk must testify the holiness of God utterly. Considering the dual relationship aspect of God's calling, Clinton rightfully asserts, "God's calling is not a private relationship with him, but to a life in community with other believers."⁵¹ He goes on to say that "it is essential for Christians to display the

⁴⁸ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6963.

⁴⁹ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 424.

⁵⁰ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 424.

⁵¹ Clinton, *Ephesians*, 229.

kind of qualities that enhance this life together. . . . ‘To walk worthily’ is a comprehensive expression that encompasses how people live in every aspect of their daily lives.”⁵² Believers’ daily life revolves around others. Therefore, the evidence of their worthy walk with Christ manifests in their relationship with fellow believers.

Fundamental Virtues

While the concept of “walk” in the sense of “manner of life” is not new to believers in the New Testament, Paul brings a new novelty to this term when he adds the adjective *worthy* to modify its meaning. With the modifier of *worthy*, he aims to elevate the quality of the walk of those who are in Christ. Paul therefore identifies four fundamental virtues believers must possess in their walk with Christ. The four qualities Paul describes in verse 2 are familiar to believers because they are character traits that Jesus exhibited in his earthly life (Phil 2:5-8). These qualities are some of the required attitudes believers must demonstrate in their relationships with one another to maintain unity in the body of Christ.

Humble believers. First, Paul appeals to believers to profess “humility” in their relationship with one another. “Humility” comes from the Greek word *ταπεινοφροσύνη*, which carries the meaning of “having a humble opinion of one’s self.”⁵³ Louw and Nida describe this quality as an “attitude without arrogance.”⁵⁴ Believers’ humble opinion of self is expressed in “a deep sense of one’s moral littleness.”⁵⁵ In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul presents Christ as the perfect model of humility (2:1-11). Having a humble opinion of oneself cannot be considered the sole meaning of humility because this quality goes more in-depth than an attitude, feeling, or emotion toward others.

⁵² Clinton, *Ephesians*, 229.

⁵³ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 8055.

⁵⁴ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 748.

⁵⁵ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 8055.

Also, it is worth noting that humility is sacrificial. One must deny self and elevate others for the sake of love. Christ is the perfect example of humility. He emptied himself from his divine nature and humbled himself when he died on the cross for believers (Phil 2:7-8).

Paul does not encourage believers to practice a quality that he himself did not possess. In the opening of chapter 4, he identifies himself as a “prisoner for the Lord” (v. 1). Paul’s “pre-calling” identity was a persecutor of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-3; 22:4-5; 26:10-11; Gal 1:13). He demonstrated this “humility” when he obediently accepted incarceration for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers’ humility must be anchored in their love for Christ (John 14:15). The proud and arrogant Paul—the “pre-calling” character—urges believers to live a life with all humility. This appeal comes from the “regenerated” Paul. Because of his “worthy walk with Christ,” he therefore has grounds to appeal to believers to practice humility in their lives. In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, Paul reminds them of his life among them from day one (Acts 20:17-21).

Evidently, Paul’s definition of humility goes beyond the conventional lexical definition. He uses Christ’s humility as the mold believers must go through for conformity in their practice of humility. They must not only walk in humility but rather in all humility (μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης). The Greek word *πᾶς*, which translates into English “all,” is used by Paul to modify the noun “humility.” Thus, believers must walk with humility in every aspect of their lives. They must understand that humility in its entirety is Christ himself.

In light of this understanding of humility, William W. Klein states, “Like the humble Jesus (Matt 11:29), Christians ought not to strive for supremacy or power; they ought to allow others to take precedence and credit (cf. Php 2:2-4).”⁵⁶ Klein’s statement strikingly uncovers the motif of arrogance among believers. They must understand that

⁵⁶ William W. Klein, *Ephesians*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon*, ed. Temper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 106.

supremacy and power belong to Christ. Because of Christ's humility, "God has highly exalted him" (Phil 2:2) and gave him "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Believers must also understand that "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Jas 4:6).

Gentle believers. Paul's second quality on his list of Christian virtues is "gentleness." The Greek word *πραΰτης*, which translates into English "gentleness" is by implication also used for "humility."⁵⁷ Gentleness is the quality of being gentle, kind, and docile. Louw and Nida define *πραΰτης* as "gentleness of attitude and behavior, in contrast with harshness in one's dealings with others."⁵⁸ Believers must address one another with kindness. Additionally, believers' attitudes must reflect Christ's humility. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul asks them to "let their speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt" (4:6). The reason believers must address each other with gentleness and respect is to create a field of love among them that reflects the love of God.

Louw and Nida reveal that "gentleness may also be expressed in some instance in an idiomatic manner, for example, always speaking softly to or not raising one's voice."⁵⁹ In communication, tone is sometimes more meaningful than the statement itself. When someone raises his voice to communicate with another person, he may project a harsh attitude. The usual reaction is often to raise his voice to level the communication. However, Paul urges believers to do otherwise. Even when the antagonist does otherwise, believers must always be kind.

By contrast, believers must understand that gentleness is not synonymous with imbecile—a person affected with moderate mental retardation. It is not also the trait of a person without backbone—a person that lacks solid and resolute character. The word

⁵⁷ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 7651.

⁵⁸ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 744.

⁵⁹ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 749.

πραΰτης in the New Testament, however, is always associated with humble people. Clinton ascertains that gentleness “is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23) and a virtue that is precious to God (1 Pet 3:4).”⁶⁰ Because the pillar of the Christians’ circle is love, believers foster gentleness of attitude and behavior in their daily relationship. They reject harshness when dealing with one another. Gentleness must be the quality that all believers exhibit in their relationship with others. Klein rightly declares, “The gentle person bears others’ burdens (Gal 6:1-2) and shows courtesy (Titus 3:2).”⁶¹

A gentle person shows politeness in his relationship with others. Polite people possess an attractive force that draws other people to them. This feature is an external expression of gentleness. Gentle believers attract others because the Holy Spirit endows them this particular virtue. They address one another with respect regardless of age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. They lift others up and give them a sense of comfort and significant importance. They also have a mild disposition to listen to others even when communication is painful to bear. Paul understood the importance of this quality in believers, and this is precisely why he treats it as a distinct trait that believers must possess in their worthy walk with Christ (v. 2).

Patient believers. Besides humility and gentleness, Paul advocates for patience among believers. The Greek word for “patience” is *μακροθυμία*, which means longsuffering, endurance, and sluggishness in retaliating for offenses. This word may find its counterpart in the Old Testament *אָרַךְ*, which translates into English “slow to anger.” This quality is proper to God and can be found in numerous passages of the Old Testament (Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). God’s patience is the same *âreḵ* that Paul appeals to believers to practice.

Along the same lines, Solomon sees a patient, slow-to-anger believer as

⁶⁰ Clinton, *Ephesians*, 230.

⁶¹ Klein, *Ephesians*, 177.

someone who “has great understanding” (Prov 14:29). Believers who possess this quality are “better than the mighty” (Prov 16:32). Patience is not passivity, but arms believers with courage and power to confront any situation and not be frightened (Phil 1:28). Patience is not resignation but an overcoming by the hope of a distant conquest—a victory here, but not yet—that can be claimed through the “endurance of opposition.”⁶²

Bear with one another. In addition to humility, gentleness, and patience, Paul points out “bearing with one another” as another essential quality that believers must cultivate in their walk with God. Paul names this trait right after patience because he understands that dealing with unpleasant situations requires patience. The Greek word *ἀνέχω*, which translates into English “to bear with one another” is commonly used to “hold oneself up” against something one should have usually acted or react upon. Frank Thielman uses the modern English word “put up” to describe the verb *ἀνέχω*: “The verb *ἀνέχω* (*anechō*) means to put up with something annoying (2 Cor 11: 1, 4, 19-20; cf. 2 Tim 4:3) or harmful (1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Thess 1:4).”⁶³ Bearing with one another is sacrificially painful without the fullness of the Spirit in the believer’s life.

Before Paul arrives at the climax of his appeal to believers for a worthy walk in Christ, he wraps the four qualities up on his list of virtues with love (*ἀγάπη*) (Eph 4:2). Here, Paul does not suggest the application of these virtues “with love,” but instead “in love” (*ἐν ἀγάπῃ*). Thus, the Greek word *ἐν* is used here as a “marker of composition”⁶⁴ to convey that “love” is not a means to exhibit these qualities but rather an end in itself. Because of love for God and neighbors, believers must show these qualities in their relationships with one another (Matt 22:37-40).

⁶² Trent C. Butler, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), s.v. “patience.”

⁶³ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 254.

⁶⁴ Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 127.

Preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In Ephesians 4:3, Paul turns his attention to the capstone of his admonition by asking believers to “eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The Greek word for “eager” is σπουδάζω, which means to “make every effort, be diligent, or labor often associates with strenuous effort.”⁶⁵ Louw and Nida describe σπουδάζω as “to do something hurriedly, with the implication of associated energy.”⁶⁶ The maintenance of unity is not something believers can postpone or procrastinate upon because it is a vital requirement for the spiritual health of the body of Christ. Believers must diligently work to maintain unity in the “body,” and they must do that zealously (4:3).

Paul entreats believers to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” because Jesus Christ “himself is our peace” (2:14). The word “peace” comes from the Greek word εἰρήνη, which translates into English “freedom from quarrels or dissension between individuals.”⁶⁷ It is also a state of “harmony, amity, concord.”⁶⁸ In other words, peace is an absence of the “wall of hostility” that divides believers with God and with one another (2:14). Paul’s appeal does not inquire believers to seek the unity of the Spirit but to maintain it. This unity is not something believers can manufacture themselves. It is the work of the Spirit and is given by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:18; 4:3).

Anders asserts, “Our call is not to create spiritual unity but rather to manifest spiritual unity by relational unity.”⁶⁹ Believers must maintain unity in their relationships, for they are members of one body. The body’s harmony ought to diffuse a melody of brotherly love that rejoices the hearts. Along the same lines, Grudem states, “When the

⁶⁵ M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2015), s.v “eager.”

⁶⁶ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 664.

⁶⁷ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6290.

⁶⁸ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6291.

⁶⁹ Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, 188.

Spirit of God is working strongly in a church to manifest God's presence, one evidence will be a beautiful harmony in the church community and overflowing love for one another."⁷⁰

When believers strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the Spirit's work becomes evident in their lives, and peace and harmony will be prevalent in the local church. The genitive case of the noun "peace" (εἰρήνη) indicates that its grammatical connection with the noun "Spirit" (πνεῦμα). Peace and harmony cannot exist in a church where the Holy Spirit is absent. The Holy Spirit unites believers with the triune God and with one another and makes them one in Christ (John 17:22-23). Paul highlights seven pillars of understanding for that "oneness," and each of them contains the adjective nominative εἷς (one), not the cardinal number "one," but somewhat identical as in the adjective "same" (αὐτός).

Believers "One Body" Union

The first reason Paul enunciates for the "oneness" of believers is rooted in the apogee of God's creation (Gen 2:7). God created man and woman in his image and designed them with a physical body entirely in harmony. Paul employs the "body" imagery to portray church unity. Believers must understand that the church is "one body." The Greek term for "one body" is ἐν σῶμα, which means the whole living body with its distinct parts. Paul uses the adjective nominative neuter "one" (ἓν) to emphasize the body's singleness and sameness. Christ is the body that reconciles us with God (Eph 2:16). Therefore, Paul's "one body" metaphor to represent the church is none other than Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:27; Col 1:18, 24). Believers are one in Christ, and they are the people of God's kingdom (Rom 9:25-26; 1 Pet 2:10). Gregg Allison writes that "the church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus

⁷⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 646.

Christ.”⁷¹ Accordingly, he says that they “have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit.”⁷² Allison’s definition of the church captures the central idea of Paul’s body imagery.

Although the “one body” (ἐν σῶμα) imagery can portray the spiritual “oneness” of the church, believers must understand that the church is both “spatial and physical.” These characteristics of the church intermingle with one another and the triune God. Jesus, in his high Priest prayer, prayed for the interfusion of the church (John 17:21). The church is spatially bound in Christ. This binding connects local churches (physical)—assemblies of redeemed saints—which in turn unites believers with one another “in the Spirit.”

Thus, the oneness pluralism of the human body is a perfect representation of the body of Christ—the church. Each local church (organs of the body) functions independently but is controlled by the same “microcontroller” (the head [Christ]) where the brain resides. A microcontroller is an integrated circuit that controls the functions of an electronic device. Without the microcontroller, the device cannot operate even if all components of the device are adequately powered. Likewise, all members of the body are controlled by the same head: Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22-23). Local churches across the world, spatially connected in Christ, form “one body,” which is Christ himself. He is also the head of the church (Eph 1:22-23, 5:23). For all parts of the body to function correctly, all vessels or arteries must be properly connected to the brain. Likewise, for the church to function properly, every member of the body must be adequately attached to the body—Jesus Christ. Believers must understand that the “one body” metaphor Paul uses to describe the church is grounded in the fact that Jesus is not only the “Body” but also the “Head” of the church.

⁷¹ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 29.

⁷² Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 29.

The Greek word for head is κεφαλή, which can have a dichotomic connotation. Literally, it is the part of the body where the brain resides. Metaphorically, it is “anything supreme, chief, prominent.”⁷³ Christ is the κεφαλή of the church literally and metaphorically. Paul exhorts believers to hold fast to the head and the whole body to nourish their souls for verdant and fruitful growth in Christ (Col 2:19). All the ligaments (individual believers of the local churches) find their nutrients when they remain attached to the body (John 15:5). Therefore, believers’ fellowship with Christ is imperative to stimulate fellowship with one another. Accordingly, Grudem writes, “Since Christ is the head of the body, which is the church (Eph. 5:23), all who are in union with Christ is also related to one another in his body.”⁷⁴ Paul uses the conjunction καί to indicate a connection between the “one body” metaphor and the “one Spirit” because believers have access to the “one Spirit” through the “one body” which is Christ himself (Eph 2:18).

Believers’ “One Spirit” Union

In addition to the “one body” union, Paul reminds believers that there is “one Spirit.” The same Spirit who raised Christ from the dead is the same Spirit who dwells in believers (Rom 8:11). This Spirit gives believers access to God the Father (Eph 2:18) and renders their worship acceptable to God (John 4:23). The Spirit of life (John 6:63) is responsible for believers’ “new being” and integrates them into the body of Christ (John 3:5-6). The Spirit, therefore, seals believers to authenticate their belonging to the body of Christ.

Believers’ “One Hope” Union

The third element on Paul’s “oneness” list is “one hope.” The Greek word for “hope” is ἐλπίς, which means “joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6940.

⁷⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 843.

⁷⁵ Strong, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 6373.

Interestingly enough, Paul did not continue with the list using the conjunction *καί* or a comma to link *ἐλπὶς* with the other elements. He went further by adding the conjunctive adverb *καθὼς* (just as or according to their call) to connect the “one body” and “one Spirit” together with the “one hope.” Believers’ calling comes with eternal hope: glorious inheritance (Eph 1:18). Allison explains, “The ‘one hope’ to which the church is called (cf. Eph. 1:18) is the ‘hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7).”⁷⁶ Believers’ call to be part of the “body” of the eternal Son of God works together with the security of their eternal life. In fact, it is the “one hope” that only Jesus Christ can offer.

Believers “One Lord” Union

The fourth element of believers’ oneness is the Lordship of Christ. The Greek word *κύριος*, which translates into English “Lord,” refers to the supremacy of the one in authority. It is also, by implication, a respectful title for a master. Louw and Nida define *κύριος* as “one who exercises supernatural authority over mankind—Lord, Ruler, one who commands.”⁷⁷ Christ has a salvific lordship over believers because he redeems them from the curse of sin (Rom 6:23). As the Victor of believers’ salvation, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been giving” to Christ (Matt 28:18).

In Philippians 2:10-12, Paul energetically shouts that “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.” The Lordship of Christ manifests the glory of God. Zechariah prophesied in the Old Testament the lordship of God over all the earth (Zech 14:9). This lordship was manifested in his Son Jesus Christ, who was crucified for believers’ sin. Two hundred years earlier, the prophet Isaiah prophesied of the kingship of Christ when he declared, “the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”

⁷⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 171.

⁷⁷ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 139.

(Isa 9:6-7). When believers understand that their Lord is the Prince of peace, they live in harmony with one another.

While there are many local churches in the world, there is one universal church under the leadership of one Lord, Jesus Christ. Paul goes further to explain to believers that there may exist in the world many gods, but believers know only one God and “Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:5-6). Believers submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ when they obey his commands (John 14:23). The two fundamental commandments that believers receive from Christ are loving God and loving their neighbors (Matt 22:37-40). Believers demonstrate their obedience to the lordship of Christ when they foster unity in the body of Christ.

Believers’ “One Faith” Union

The fifth element of believers’ oneness in Christ is their “one faith” union—their collective trust in the “one Lord,” Jesus Christ. Again, Paul indicates to believers that their faith in Christ is unique, having one faith, because only one Savior delivered them from their sins (Rom 10:9). Jesus Christ shed his blood on the cross as a propitious sacrifice to gain God’s favor and redeem believers from his wrath. According to Wellum, “there could be no ‘Tetelestai!’ until *Jesus* [emphasis added] life was given.”⁷⁸ His death secures believers’ redemption and gives them the “one hope” to spend their eternity in the presence of God. Believers’ confession that Jesus is Lord is the only faith that saves (Phil 2:11; Rom 10:9). Believers’ atonement is only possible in Jesus Christ. He is the Expiator who extinguished believers’ sin when he shed his blood on the cross.

Indeed, Christ’s death would not have been effective without his resurrection. His resurrection proves that he is the giver of life; He gave his own life as a ransom for believers’ sin and victoriously reclaimed it as he said to his disciples (Mark 8:31). Thomas

⁷⁸ Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 122.

R. Schreiner writes, “Believers are justified by Christ as the crucified and risen *Savior*.”⁷⁹ The *Tetelesthai* cry of Jesus on the cross (“It is finished” [John 19:30]) gives him the authority to declare to his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt 28:18). Jesus is the only legitimate object of believers’ faith. He is also the only one who promises believers a residence in his Father’s house (John 14:1-3). The “one faith” that Paul mentions in Eph 4:5 cannot be in anyone other than the crucified Jesus. According to Jude, this “one faith” is the “most holy faith” in “the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 1:20-21).

Believers’ “One Baptism” Union

The sixth element of believers’ oneness in Christ is their “one baptism.” Believers’ baptism is distinct because it performs in the name of the “one Lord”—Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5; Rom 6:3). Baptism, therefore, identifies believers with Christ. It initiates them formally and overtly in the body of Christ. The initiation is a public declaration that believers make to testify that they are under one lordship. Dunnam states, “Baptism is the outward sign by which we are united in one Lord.”⁸⁰ This identification with Christ cannot be a secret engagement. It must be visible to all because, by this means, believers can utterly declare with apostle Paul “if they live, it is no longer them who live but Christ who lives in them” (Gal 2:20). Likewise, Curtis Heffelfinger asserts, “This ordinance is the one and only initiation rite for us that points to our unity in Christ and our incorporation into his one body.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*, The 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 56, emphasis added.

⁸⁰ Dunnam, *Galatians-Philemon*, 198.

⁸¹ Curtis Heffelfinger, *The Peace Making Church: 8 Biblical Keys to Resolve Conflict and Preserve Unity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 81.

Believers “One God” Union

The seventh and final element of believers’ oneness in Christ is the “one God” union. This element is the substance of believers’ oneness because all the other six elements on the “oneness” list proceed from it. Paul concludes his trilogy—a series of three “oneness” elements—with “God the Father” instead of a trio of fundamental “oneness” elements that bind believers with one another. Obviously, Paul wants to emphasize the headship of God, who is the “Father of all” and the Architect of believers’ salvation and their beliefs. It is also noteworthy to say that Paul’s theology understands the unity of the triune God, which emanates from God the Father. He is “one God and Father of all.” The eternal Son, Jesus Christ, proceeds from him. The Father chose believers before the foundation of the world in his eternal Son, Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-5). Jesus declares, “All the Father gives me will come to me” (John 6:37). Believers put their faith in Christ because of their unconditional election and the irresistible grace of God.

Believers’ salvation is the work of God in Jesus Christ. The monotheistic view of Paul’s theology reinvigorates that Christians believe in one God, the Father of all (v. 6). The triune nature of God does not make him a God with three heads. He is the God who created Adam and Eve (Gen 1:27). He is also the same God who delivered Noah and his family from the flood (Gen 6:18). He is the God who liberated the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exod 14:30-31). He is also the same God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead for believers’ redemption (Acts 2:24; Rom 10:9; Heb 13:20). God has sovereign control over his world and his creatures.

According to John Frame, “God has the power to direct the whole course of nature and history as he pleases.”⁸² God controls nature and humankind because he owns them (Deut 10:14; Pss 24:1; 89:11). Paul further elaborates on the “one God” union when he states, “God is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). According to Stuart

⁸² John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 21.

Briscoe, the “one God” is “the ultimate ground of all unity.”⁸³ He concurs with E. F. Scott that “all Christians are united because ‘God is *over* them all; His presence pervades the church to which they belong; He dwells *within* their very hearts.’”⁸⁴ Thielman elaborates further on the substance of the “one God” by expounding several truths from the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. He notices that all these truths contain the expression *πάντα* (all things), which ties together the sovereign authority of God over all things (Eph 1:10-11, 22; 3:9, 15).⁸⁵

Demonstration of an Imitable Biblical Spiritual Life Transformation (Eph 5:1-8)

Believers cultivate a worthy walk with Christ when they demonstrate an imitable biblical spiritual transformation in their lives. An exegesis of Ephesians 5:1-8 will show that believers must imitate the sacrificial model of Christ.

An Imitating Walk

According to Snodgrass, “Imitation of God is an overwhelming idea in the abstract, but the experience of God’s forgiving love makes imitation both necessary and natural.”⁸⁶ While the idea of imitating God is overwhelming, Snodgrass believes that the depth of God’s forgiving love makes it an irresistible nature that believers must possess. The Greek word “*μιμέομαι*,” which translates into English “to imitate” carries a conventional connotation of “mimic, do like, resemble, impersonate” someone.⁸⁷

Believers are beloved children of God and followers of Christ. As beloved children, they

⁸³ Stuart D. Briscoe, *Genesis-Revelation*, The Preacher’s Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 198.

⁸⁴ Briscoe, *Genesis-Revelation*, 198.

⁸⁵ Thielman, *Ephesians*, 259.

⁸⁶ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 260.

⁸⁷ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 3198.

obey God in their walk. They live a life that resembles the life of Jesus Christ. Paul admonishes believers to have a walk that differs from their former walk—different from the life they lived when they were dead in their trespasses; a walk associated with unbelievers who walk in darkness.

The notion of imitating God’s character is not a new concept invented by Paul. The Old Testament is full of commands that urge God’s people to be like their Creator. God commissioned Moses to ask the people of Israel that they “shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). This command serves as the foundational reference for Paul to develop the theological theme: “Be imitators of God.” Paul’s basis for this command is that believers are “beloved children” of God (Eph 5:1). Because believers followed the deceitfulness of sin, their former life was corrupted. Consequently, the adoption of a renewed spirit of mind must be diligently sought among believers. Believers must live in the likeness of God because they bear the image of God, which is righteousness and holiness of the truth (v. 24).

Imitation by Repudiation

Believers must repudiate all vices in their lives if they want to imitate God. Paul enumerates certain vices believers must repudiate because of their new nature in Christ. To replace these vices, Paul recommends to believers three virtues for which they must strive. His recommendations encompass a series of outward moral qualities that reflect or manifest Christ’s love. The manifestation of love in believers is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which seals them for the day of their redemption (Eph 4:30).

Consequently, believers imitate God because they are his regenerated image in Christ. They become imitators of Christ when they walk by his example. They accept others as Christ does (1 Cor 11:1), forgive others as Christ forgives (Col 3:13), and sacrifice themselves for others as Christ did (1 John 3:16). Paul starts his recommendations with a direct appeal to believers to walk in love. The use of the present imperative of the verb “walk” sets the tone of the command. Because the imperative mood is timeless, Paul

uses the present tense for this command. Believers must, therefore, continuously walk in love.

The context also Paul uses the present imperative mood—"Be imitators of God" (v. 1); the command carries the meaning of "make it your habit to do" what God does.⁸⁸ Snodgrass believes that "love is the sphere in which the believer lives."⁸⁹ Love is the field of operation of all believers. This functional criterion must guide believers in their daily walk with Christ.

A Walk in God's Love (vv. 1-2)

Regenerated believers walk in God's love. Consider, for example, the verb "to walk," which comes from the Greek word (περιπατέω). It often carries the connotation of "to live" in the New Testament. Its counterpart word in the Hebraic language, "לָבַד," also has the meaning "to live" in addition to "regulate one's life and to conduct oneself." In the New Testament, περιπατέω is definitely Pauline because he uses it thirty-one times in his epistles. In most cases, Paul uses περιπατέω together with the preposition ἐν to reinforce its symbolic meaning.

Regenerated believers love unconditionally. Because God's love is unconditional, believers must also love unconditionally. God unconditionally decided to choose believers and love them eternally in Christ (John 3:16; 4:9-11; Rom 5:8; Eph 2:4-5). He did not consider their former walk to make this choice, but by grace chose them in Christ and transposed them from the domain of darkness to a new life in Christ to be "holy and blameless" before him (Eph 1:4). During that permutation, God unconditionally decided to forgive believers' trespasses through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:7). Consequently, believers are required to imitate God's love and forgiveness (Eph 5:1;

⁸⁸ David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 186.

⁸⁹ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 252.

1 John 4:11). Paul did not come up with such a requirement, but he reminds believers of God's expectation of them as beloved children in Christ.

Another attribute of God's love is mercy. The Greek word for mercy ἔλεος carries the same meaning as in the Hebrew word רַחֲמִים. Both words emphasize loving-kindness, goodness, and the favor of God's mercy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Mercy is the forbearance, compassion, or forgiveness God shows to sinful humanity."⁹⁰ It is also considered unmerited grace and favor shown to a person with no right to receive it. Believers imitate God when they show mercy to their neighbors because of the mercy God shows to them. Christ illustrates God's mercy in several parables in the New Testament, but the parable of the lost son is the most poignant example of God's mercy (Luke 15:11-32). One could consider David's exclamation in Psalm 103, for example, when he proclaims God's mercy citing his loving-kindness and compassion. He further adds that God does not deal with sinners according to their sins because of his loving-kindness (vv. 8-10).

When believers love as God loves, they forgive others' trespasses. Paul asks believers to "forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave them" (Eph 4:32). Paul's admonition to believers to forgive as God forgives alludes to Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Believers need to take the unilateral initiative to forgive those who do wrong to them (Matt 5:23-24). Likewise, Paul invites believers to put up with one another through forgiveness (Col 3:13). Following Paul's exhortation to believers to forgive as Christ forgives, Strong writes, "Believers should forgive their fellow brothers on the ground of God's love, and Christ's bearing of their sins. . . . They must, therefore, forgive freely, only upon the ground of what Christ has done."⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "mercy."

⁹¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 835.

Regenerate Believers Love Sacrificially

Sacrificial love requires suffering. Believers are called to suffer for the sake of love. Jesus teaches believers the pattern of sacrificial love through his death on the cross. This pattern depicts his humility—He denies his divine nature to take human nature to die on the cross for sinners (Phil 2:5-8). Believers should be willing to lay down their lives for others as Christ did on the cross (1 John 3:16). Sacrificial love is selfless love. Jesus declares, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Believers who love unselfishly promote unity in the body of Christ. Sacrificial love is seeing others through the lens of Christ’s love for sinners. Numerous passages in Scriptures depict Christ’s sacrificial love for believers (Isa 53:5; John 3:16; 13:34; Rom 4:24, 5:8; 8:32; Gal 1:4; Eph 5:1-2; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 4:10). Consequently, believers must practice sacrificial love in relationships with others.

Believers’ love is not egocentric. Selfless believers are mindful of the weaknesses of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. When believers love as God loves, they forgive one another regardless of wrongdoings. They also pay careful attention to how they act among their brothers and sisters. Paul goes as far as food consumption to highlight the importance of love in believers’ relationships: “If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.” The Christian’s life is communal. Believers do not live for themselves but for the One who redeemed them from the wrath of God (Gal 2:20).

Believers’ Servanthood Attitude

Servanthood attitude among the children of God is one of the key indices of their love for Christ and one another. When Christians cultivate a spirit of service as taught by Christ, they profess self-denial love (Matt 20:25-28). God calls his people to serve one another mutually. In his teachings, Christ encourages believers to deny the spirit of lordship over fellow brothers and sisters; they must instead practice the servanthood attitude. He demonstrated this servanthood attitude symbolically in washing his disciples’ feet (John

13:1-20). The aim of the servant attitude is for all believers to serve each other in love. It must be a lifestyle that believers foster continuously in the body of Christ.

Freedom from the Bondage of Sin Fuels Believers' Servanthood Attitude

Because of their freedom from the bondage of sin, believers serve one another in love. Indeed, they serve with humility and not arrogance (Gal 5:13). They use their spiritual endowments cheerfully for mutual edification in the body of Christ (1 Pet 4:10). Snodgrass asserts, "God called Christians to mutually edifying unity in Christ. That is both our task and our identity."⁹² When believers serve one another with humility in love, they solidify the bond of unity in the body of Christ. A life of service also means a life of sharing. Believers' life is not self-centered but instead a shared life. Paul reminds believers to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" (Rom 12:13). When believers contribute in love to the needs of the saints, they display their love for Christ overtly (Heb 6:10). Jesus declared to Peter, "Feed my sheep" if you love me (John 21:17). Christians obey this command when they serve one another in love, thus showing their love for Christ.

Believers' Concerns for the Welfare of Others

Another way believers demonstrate their love for one another is by showing concern for the welfare of others. Believers take care of one another because they belong to the same body of Christ. The responsibility to carry others' burdens to alleviate suffering is a command of Christ. This command has a reward attached to it. Jesus declares, "Truly, I say to you, as you did to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matt 25:34-40). The Greek word ἐλάχιστος, translated into English "least," has a meaning of smallest in the estimation of men, or rank and excellence. It also carries the meaning of the Hebrew word קטן, which usually translates in a diminutive sense—something

⁹² Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 264.

insignificant, unimportant, less in dignity. The word ἐλάχιστος is the same as the word μικρός. Louw and Nida define μικρός as “pertaining to being of low or unimportant status—low, unimportant in contrast with μέγας “great, important.”⁹³

In Matthew 25:40, Jesus uses ἐλάχιστος to stress the importance of doing good to neighbors. In the text mentioned above, the genitive case accentuates the significance Jesus put on “taking care” of all brothers and sisters regardless of their social status. Believers must not underestimate the importance of doing good to all. Paul also appeals to believers to do good to all whenever an opportunity arises. He also reminds them that they must prioritize the community of faith (Gal 6:10). Those who believe in Christ must not neglect the care for the members of the body of Christ. The apostle John goes further to declare, “If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17). All believers must answer this poignant question when assessing their loving walk in Christ.

Mutual Respect: An Indicator of Believers’ Love for Christ

When believers love one another, they treat each other with respect. They take great care in their relationships to show deep respect for one another in everyday interactions. Respect reflects the love (ἀγάπη) believers show in their relationships with one another. Paul exhorts believers to clothe themselves with a compassionate heart, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Col 3:12). Believers sympathize with others’ feelings when they communicate with one another. They exhibit Christ’s kindness to talk to each other. Jesus declares, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt 7:12). Believers’ love and commitment to Christ propel their respect for one another.

Regardless of the stake of a conflict that may arise among believers, they must exercise a respectful attitude toward one another. When they respect each other with love,

⁹³ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 400.

they show their love for Christ. Love does not harm other people. After all, believers show their love when they do good to one another. Consequently, they give unambiguous evidence of their love for God when they love their neighbors. It is also evident that someone who has full use of his mind would never harm his own body, and because believers are members of the same body—Christ’s body—they do not harm one another. Instead, they love one another unconditionally. Christ’s second command—love for neighbors (Matt 22:39-40)—reinforces the pragmatism of the Christians’ Golden Rule (Matt 7:12).

Harmony in the Body of Christ: An Indicator of Believers’ Love for One Another

Love binds unity in perfect harmony (Col 3:14). The compelling power of love annihilates the force of hostility among believers and creates perfect harmony in their midst. After admonishing believers to reject “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” (Col 3:8), Paul follows with a tender admonition to encourage them to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God forgave them” (Col 3:12). The way of practicing these virtues is love. As he describes in 1 Corinthians 13, “love is patient and kind” (v. 4). Disunity in a church is a symptom of the absence of love. Where love is absent, the Holy Spirit is not present. Members of the same body cannot live in division because they are controlled by the head—Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22).

In fact, believers exhibit sustainable love when they abide in Christ. Their love for one another testifies to their fellowship with Christ and makes them intimately inseparable (John 13:34-35). Because believers are Christ’s body, they must always act toward others in a manner that reflects Christ. It is certain that love for God cannot be separated from the love of neighbors. Accordingly, John declares, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love for others proceeds from the love of God. Jesus declares, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”

(John 14:15). He further adds, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Believers imitate God when they walk in love. They become a fragrant offering and sacrifice well-pleasing to God (2 Cor 2:14-16; Eph 5:2; Phil 4:18). Otherwise, they walk in the desire of the flesh and give themselves up to sexual immorality, impurity, and greed (Eph 5:3). Believers who practice this lifestyle do not honor God. Paul also believes that profanity is as sinful as sexual immorality itself. Therefore, he admonishes believers to amputate from their minds all kinds of foul language such as obscenity, foolish talk, and coarse joking. Instead, believers must give thanks to God in everything (Eph 5:4).

Believers Must Walk in Purity (vv. 3-7; Col 3:5)

A “walk” in love leads to a “walk” in purity. Paul enumerates a triad of cognate vices that believers must disassociate from in their walk with Christ. He believes it is shameful to even talk about these things among the saints (v. 4). Believers must repudiate all kinds of immorality pertaining to sex. He creates in this admonition a pattern that intertwines a command with a motivation. For each command, a stimulus encourages believers to reject a vice and adopt a virtue. Paul did not explicitly use the word “avoid,” but another compound word *ὀνομάζω* to appeal to believers to avoid these sinful practices. The term *ὀνομάζω* can be best translated into English as “to be named or mention.” To prevent something is to keep away from it. Paul enumerates three viruses of the same family that believers must quash in their lives: (1) sexual immorality, (2) all impurity that is related to sex, and (3) covetousness.

The Greek word for sexual immorality is *πορνεία*, which carries the meaning of illicit sexual intercourse in the New Testament. Louw and Nida describe *πορνεία* as an act of someone who engages in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution.⁹⁴ Sexual immorality destroys believers’ communion with God and with

⁹⁴ Louw and Nida, *Lexicon of the New Testament*, 771.

one another. In 1 Corinthians 6:13, Paul reminds believers that “the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” He further adds that “believers’ bodies are members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15). Believers must understand that sexual immorality is also a selfish act that tarnishes the sanctity of marriage, which is a sacred sacrament of God.

Believers must reject all profane speech related to sex for self-gratification. This kind of obscene talk must not even be named among Christians. Indecent speech is an offense to people of the opposite sex and an assault on female sexual dignity. Such behavior among believers destroys the unity of the body.

A Walk in Purity Puts to Death Covetousness

The last cognate vice of the triad sins on Paul’s list is covetousness. Paul’s exhortation alludes to the tenth command (Deut 5:21) and Jesus’s command on lust (Matt 5:28). This sin is a common disease among believers. It destroys homes and lives. It is a violation of the trust believers put in one another as members of the body of Christ. A coveter fosters hatred and leads others to fall into the trap of hatred and revenge. Because believers are one in Christ, they do not covet their brothers’ house (Exod 20:17). They put to death sexual immorality—fornication, adultery, and lust. They do not covet their brothers’ wives or the husbands of their sisters. They do not violate their marital vow—to love “until death do us part.” Believers must understand that those who commit covetousness are idolaters. Therefore, they have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (v. 5).

In conclusion, Paul urges believers to keep themselves away from those who deceive them—those who suppress the truth. He also reminds them of the reason the wrath of God is upon humanity—man is the son of disobedience (v. 6). The devil deceived Adam and Eve with vain words and caused them to disobey the Word of God. Believers must at all times walk in the obedience of the Word of God. They should imitate David’s

awareness of the disobedience of God's Word and take the initiative to "store up the Word of God in their hearts" (Ps 119:11). Moreover, they must disassociate from the suppressors of truth who are sons of their father, the devil (John 8:44).

Believers Must Walk in Light (vv. 8-14)

Light and darkness are eternally incompatible. Those who walk in light have no fellowship with those who walk in darkness. There is a tendency among believers to interpret this verse as a separation of "righteous" believers with "sinful" believers. This interpretation is wrong because Paul is talking about the fruitless deeds of darkness. Believers must disassociate themselves with those fruitless deeds. They must indeed expose the fruitless deeds of darkness as such.

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul depicts a sharp contrast between the fruit of light (deeds of the Spirit) and the fruits of darkness (deeds of the flesh; 5:16-23). The fruit of light is productive in substance. It supplies believers with a transformative power to love their neighbors as themselves, live an upright life, and "walk in truth." In contrast to the productive deeds of the fruit of light, Paul provides an inexhaustible list of fruitless deeds that come from the desires of the flesh. These fruitless deeds differ diametrically from the fruit of light because they are fruits of darkness. Jesus himself declares, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Light reveals what darkness conceals (vv. 13-14). "Light turns darkness into light. This is the church's mission," declares Anders.⁹⁵ Believers must be the rays of this transformative light in the world. Jesus states, "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). Because believers are the body of Christ, and Christ is the Light of the World, believers are the light of the world. Consequently, they must "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:7).

⁹⁵ Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, 215.

Paul turns on the alarm to wake up believers who are walking in darkness (Eph 5:14). This alarm alludes to Isaiah's prophecy: "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise" (Isa 26:19). He continues further to declare, "Arise, shine for your light has come" (Isa 60:1). The apostle John concurs with Isaiah and Paul with a logical argument on the light and darkness metaphors (1 John 1:6-7). Believers cannot walk in darkness and claim they have fellowship with Christ. This claim cannot be a true statement because Jesus Christ is the light. Believers can have fellowship with Christ and with one another if they walk in the light.

Conclusion

Believers' "worthy walk" with Christ undergirds their understanding of the source of their salvation. Paul's admonition to believers to exhibit such a walk in their life is based on the unity of the triune God. The harmony of the triune God projects the awe of his holiness. Ephesians 1 depicts God's expectations of believers' walk as adopted children in Christ. Because of their position in God's family, they must live a holy and blameless life before God (v. 4). Believers must also understand that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can foster such a life with Christ. Therefore, they must submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Believers' willingness to let the Holy Spirit control their lives shows their kinship to God's family.

Beyond believers' knowledge of the source of their salvation and their willingness to let the Holy regulate their lives, Scripture also emphasizes their heavenly citizenship. Ephesians 2 reveals that citizens of heaven walk in unity with the triune God—they live under the rules of God's kingdom. Because believers are adopted children in Christ, they share one Father, the eternal God. Therefore, they are children of light and live in the truth (1 John 3:19). Believers "should love one another" because love is the catalyst of their unified walk in Christ (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:11-17). When believers walk in the "unity of the Spirit," they live in peace with one another (Eph 4:3), which "binds everything in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). Finally, believers must display their "worthy

walk” in deeds because deeds utter God’s holiness, love, and grace (John 13:35; 1 John 3:18).

CHAPTER 3

A NEW TESTAMENT LOCAL CHURCH WITH A HEALTHY ECCLESIOLOGY TRAINS ITS MEMBERS TO FOSTER A CHRIST- CENTERED BIBLICAL UNITY

Matthew 16:13-20 reports a game-changing event in Jesus’s mission on earth. The two questions Jesus asks the disciples about himself in this text bring to light the image of God’s kingdom on earth. “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” answers Peter to Jesus’s second question (16:16). Immediately, Jesus brings to Peter’s attention the source of this revelation when he states, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (16:17).

God’s revelation to Peter about Christ’s identity prompted the Lord Jesus to lay down the church’s foundation. “I will build my church,” declares the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 16:18). His declaration teaches believers that the church (*ἐκκλησία*) belongs to him. The proprietary mark of the church is essential for in-depth knowledge of the church’s institution. In Ephesians 2:19-21, Paul describes the church as the “household of God.” The house is Christ himself because he is the “cornerstone” in whom the “whole structure” erects into the eternal temple of God. God handpicks the residents of his house and gives them to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 6:37), who is the Head of the church (Eph 1:22-23). Believers belong to Christ and are called to live under his rules.

Paul further depicts the household of God as the “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27). Paul’s “one body” metaphor reminds believers that they are part of the same body—Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:12). Believers are members of the same body and “fellow citizens . . . of the household of God” (Eph 2:20). This chapter will outline the benefits that emanate from a local church that fosters Christ-centered biblical unity among its members.

A Christ-Centered Biblical Unity Is Essential to Help Believers Experience God’s Power in the Work of Ministry in the Local Church

The first benefit that emanates from a local church that fosters Christ-centered biblical unity is the manifestation of God’s power in all spheres of its ministries. Biblical unity propels the work of the Holy Spirit among believers. The church of Jerusalem is a concrete example of such empowerment (Acts 2:42-47). This propelling force empowers believers to move from their actual development to their potential development in Christ, a development that the Holy Spirit orchestrates in believers.

Because the Holy Spirit endows believers with spiritual gifts, they possess the will and the means to experience God’s power in the local church’s ministries (1 Cor 12:1-11). Paul unequivocally ascertains that God endows spiritual gifts to everyone who believes in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 12:6). The endowment of spiritual gifts to believers is for the common good—building up the body of Christ. It allows the local church to experience God’s power through an effective ministry of the Word and a transformational worship ministry.

Experiencing God’s Power through an Effective Ministry of the Word

The local church experiences God’s power through the effective ministry of the Word. This ministry rests upon two fundamental elements: preaching and teaching. These two aspects are designed to protect the flock from error, promote faithfulness and moral purity, and provide soul-encouraging truth that draws believers closer to God. The proclamation of the Word must be of the highest importance in a local church because God’s love for believers in Christ is the only power that can transform life.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 explains Scripture’s *raison d’être* in the local church’s life. Protecting the flock of God from error is of the highest importance in the list. In fact, Paul uses “reproof” and “correction” as means to correct believers from error. The inerrancy of the Word of God must be taken seriously in the local church to prevent the spread of heresy among the people of God.

Heretics falsify and twist the Word of God to advance their perverse causes. Such teachers must not be tolerated in the church. Tertullian believes that heresy creates a “diversity of doctrine” in the local church. He goes on to say, “Where diversity of doctrine is found, there, then, must the corruption both of the Scriptures and the expositions thereof be regarded as existing.”¹ Where there is corruption of the Scripture, there cannot be the manifestation of God’s power. Only the sound doctrine of the Word can produce a transformational effect in believers’ lives.

Faithful walk. Effective communication of the Word enables believers to walk faithfully with Christ. Accordingly, preaching promotes faithfulness in the believer’s walk. Historically, the preaching ministry has been considered the first mark of the church. Through preaching, the church proclaims the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21). Luther ascertains, “Outwardly he [God] deals with us through the oral [preached] Word of the gospel.”² The preaching of the Word is necessary to illuminate Christians’ understanding through the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Word is preached, the Holy Spirit manifests its position in the heart of hearers. He enlightens the minds of the chosen ones and makes them rightfully understand the effective call.³

Selfless work of ministry. Effective communication of the Word enables believers to selflessly do the work of ministry in the local church. Therefore, the preaching of the Word plays a vital role in the constitution of a true church. According to Allister McGrath, “The visible church is constituted by the preaching of the word of God: no

¹ Quintus Tertullianus, *The Prescription against Heretics*, ed. Arthur C. Coxe (Savage, MN: Lighthouse, 2015), 1392.

² Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 152. “

³ Allister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 89. The canon of Synod asserts, “When God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or work in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but by the efficacy [effectiveness] of the same regenerating spirit, he pervades the inmost recesses of the man“ (149).

human assembly may claim to be the ‘church of God’ unless it is founded on this gospel. . . . It is more important to preach the same gospel as the apostles than to be a member of an institution which is historically derived from them.”⁴

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin asserts, “The grace of the Gospel is publicly and privately sealed in the minds of believers through those whom the Lord appointed, and the only method in which this can be done is by preaching.”⁵ According to Calvin, sound preaching of Scripture is of utmost importance. He also believes that the Word must be preached orally. Wherever the pure preaching of the Word of God exists, the church of God exists. Historical theology helps gifted ministers proclaim the oracles of God with the soundness of Scripture (1 Pet 4:11). Such communication of the divine oracles must be centered on the person and work of Christ.

Logocentric orientation. Effective communication of the Word enables believers to comprehend that Christ-centered living is the *modus vivendi* of the local church. Faithful men and women of God understand that God has chosen them to live a holy and blameless life before him (Eph 1:4). Such a life must be logocentric. Because Christ is the incarnated Word of God, believers’ lives must be centered on him and him alone (John 1:1).

One should note that the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16-17) contains everything Christians need to know to live a Godly life. Believers must continuously seek the Holy Spirit’s illumination to understand Scripture better. When the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind of believers, they regard the Word of God as the supreme authority in their lives.

As a school of faith, the local church must recognize that the Word of God is the only seed that can transform the lives of its members. Through the power of the Holy

⁴ McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 173.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 130.

Spirit, the Word germinates in believers' hearts and empowers them to bear fruit (Matt 13:1-23). Therefore, the church must stay on its knees in supplication for gifted and reliable ministers to teach the flock of God to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10).

Draw near God. The ministry of the Word provides soul-encouraging truth that draws believers closer to God. In Ephesians 4:11-14, Scripture affirms that God endows the church with gifted people “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until [they] all attain the unity of the faith” and exhibit the spiritual maturity that will guard against false doctrines. On the one hand, this responsibility is enormous because it is a matter of eternal death and life. Therefore, the church must take seriously its responsibility to feed its members with sound doctrine. On the other hand, this task is a dignified one and must be “entrusted to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2) because Christ mandates the church to be the gatekeeper of God’s kingdom on earth (Matt 16:19; 5:19; 18:18). Wayne Grudem extrapolates from Colossians 1: 28 to add that the church is accountable “to present to God every Christian ‘mature in Christ.’”⁶

Gerald Bray aptly comments, “Virtually all the Reformers agreed that the ‘visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached.’”⁷ Such a statement reminds believers that the Word of God must govern every aspect of the church of Jesus Christ. The apostolic church—the church during the apostles’ time (AD 100)—understood that the Word of God is the primary nutrient the church needs to grow in the love of God and neighbors (Acts 2:42-47).

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 867.

⁷ Gerard L. Bray, *Doing Theology with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 209.

Experiencing God’s Power through a Transformational Ministry of Worship

The local church experiences God’s power through a transformational ministry of worship. Alongside the proclamation of the Word of God, the ministry of worship displays the induction of God’s power in believers. When believers worship the Creator in spirit and truth (John 4:24), they participate with the angels in the beatification of the Most High.

What exactly then is worship? Matthew C. McMahon and Therese B. McMahon extract the definition from the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, which states it this way, “‘What is the chief end of man?’ Answer: ‘To glorify God and enjoy him forever’ (cf. Eccl 12:13; Eph 1:11-12).”⁸ Thus, believers glorify God when they carry out God’s purpose for their existence. This purpose encompasses their obedience to the Word of God and their communion with each other. Christians must relentlessly seek to be the kind of creature God intended them to be (Eph 1:4); only then shall they fit into the created order and be agents of harmony rather than disruption. Human beings are *not* heroes of the human story, for human destiny is not anthropocentric but theocentric. Worship, thus, is not an invention of man but a divine foreordained expectation of the Creator. It is God’s requirement for his creature to worship him. God instituted in his Word the acceptable way a man should worship him.⁹

Christ-centered worship. Believers honor God when their worship is centered on Christ. Through Christ, the church gives glory to God in everything it does. Numerous texts in Scripture reveal God’s purpose for the creation—His glory (Ps 19:1; 108:5). As God’s regenerated “image-bearers” in Christ, Christians are called to “declare God’s glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the people” (Ps 96:3; Eph 3:21).

⁸ Matthew C. McMahon and Therese B. McMahon, *The 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3rd ed. (Crossville, TN: Puritan, 2014), “A Shorter Catechism,” Kindle.

⁹ *The 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith*, chap. 21, “Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day,” para. 1.

When the church gathers to worship God, their *telos* must be to glorify God. Believers' ultimate goal in praising God is not a mere liturgical cult of worship but an expression of their lifestyle.

Furthermore, Augustus Strong asserts that “worship is ‘formal communion between God and his people.’ In it, God speaks to man and man to God.”¹⁰ This communion is real and must be understood as such. Therefore, the shepherding of souls in this area must receive individual attention from the church. When the church allows God to be the center of attention in its worship services, there will be an outward expression of sanctity, the believers' adoration to the majestic God.

Holy praises. The local church must honor God with holy praises. Benjamin Maira ascertains, “The church has to be equipped with the ministry of the gospel and the Holy Spirit and teach the people how to worship and serve God.”¹¹ The church's ministry cannot be productive without earnest prayers and a laudation of praises and thanksgiving to God when believers meet together in worship.

According to 1 Peter 2:9, Christians are “a royal priesthood.” As such, every redeemed Christian, by the blood of Christ, must worship the Lord with a thanksgiving heart. This worship must not find its roots in human cultures nor human savvy, but in Scripture prescribed acceptable worship to God (John 14:23-24; Rom 8:14; Phil 3:3).

Authentic worship. Given that authentic worship comes from the heart, Christians must continuously survey the “dynamic expression of their hearts” in their relationship with God.¹² John S. Hammett asserts, “True worship must be first God-centered, Spirit-empowered, Christ-focused, biblically grounded and shaped, and

¹⁰ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, 2015), chap. 1, section 5, para. 4c, Kindle.

¹¹ Benjamin Maira, *Local Church: Holy Spirit Unique Entity* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2013), 38.

¹² Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016), 29.

Multifacet.”¹³ Similarly, Gregg Allison believes that “the church is to be orthodoxological, or oriented to the proper (Gk. *Ortho*) glory (Gk. *Doxa*) of God.”¹⁴ Anytime the church meets to worship God, it must bear in mind that God is the supreme Receptor of glory. Therefore, the songs that the church sings must utter God’s majesty. Hammett agrees with Allison but adds that “the Spirit is the one who initiates, enables, and prompts us to worship.”¹⁵ Consequently, the church must build its worship program according to the guidelines of Scripture.

Acceptable worship to God is far more potent than a faith-moving mountain (Matt 17:20). When the church worships God, it shows reverence for His holy character. Believers must first consider the holiness of God when they worship him. Therefore, they must come to the sacred throne with “a broken spirit; and a broken and contrite heart” (Ps 51:17).

When believers approach the throne of God with a cleansed heart, He comes near them and communes with them. Worshipping God cannot be a mere act of calling His name. It must be done in truth (Ps 145:18). A united church is a set of true worshippers; therefore, they must worship the Lord in truth and Spirit (John 4:23-24). Jesus reminded the woman of Samaria by the well that his Father is seeking such worshippers—those who worship him in Spirit and truth (John 4:23). When hearts are united, the Holy Spirit can exercise his ministry freely among believers.

Characters of true worshippers. Allison describes three essential characters of worshippers when they come to the presence of God, “Coram Deo.”¹⁶ First, their

¹³ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), 274.

¹⁴ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 108.

¹⁵ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 240.

¹⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 425.

living reflects a life of sincerity (2 Cor 2:17)—reverence to the holiness of God. In 2 Corinthians 2:15-17, Paul reminds believers of their status in the community of saints. They are not only God’s children but also the “aroma of Christ to God.”

Second, believers’ lives must be a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [*their*] spiritual worship” (Rom 12: 1)—a life of obedience to the Word of God. The Greek term εὐωδία (aroma) has a connotation in the New Testament of “a thing well-pleasing to God.”¹⁷ When a Christ-centered united church comes to the “Coram Deo,” it propels a powerful sweet aroma, well-pleasing to God. Such worship displays to God the magnificent propitiatory sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross for the atonement of believers’ sin.

Third, believers must live a life of gratitude and hope. They must be grateful for the redeeming work of Christ on the cross by his own blood. Each time believers come to the presence of God “Coram Deo,” in their daily lives, they ought to give praises of thanksgiving to the Lord for being part of this new covenant in Christ. Also, they must give praise to God for the “eschatological hope”¹⁸ they have in Christ to live an eternal victorious and glorious life in the presence of God (Rev 21:3-4).

Consequently, believers benefit from God’s powerful presence when they worship him in Spirit and truth. The transformational effect of God’s presence manifests itself and can be felt during the corporate worship of the saints. It produces tears of awe and joy in believers. It reminds them that they have “one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:6) who calls them to live a life of unity of the Spirit in Christ. Because they are part of the family of God, they love God, the Father of all (Matt 22:37-41, Eph 4:6), and they love one another as well.

¹⁷ James Strong, *A Comprehensive Strong Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Bestbooksmedia, 2015), 6623.

¹⁸ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 425.

A Christ-Centered Biblical Unity Is Essential to Strengthen Believers' Faith in Christ through Mutual Love and Service

When every aspect of life in the local church is governed by believers' love for God and one another, the church finds itself in a position to experience the manifestation of God's power. In John 14:15, Jesus declares to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commands." He further summarizes his commands: "Love God and love neighbors" (Matt 22:37-40). The resulting force of Jesus' command lies in believers' communal lives because they can share their love for one another.

God bestows on the local church gifted leaders to train and equip his people for the "work of ministry, and for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-14). The train-and-equip mission of gifted teachers fosters a better understanding of believers' love for God and one another in the local church. They understand that the love for God requires an act of faith because God is Spirit (John 4: 24). Since Scripture teaches believers that "it is impossible to please God without faith" (Heb 11:6), then faith is governed by hopeful certainties and proven vision (Heb 11:1).

Believers' hopeful certainties depict the schemas that they develop from their new birth and throughout their spiritual journey. Felicity Kelcourse argues, "Fruitful faith proves its value not only to an individual but also to the faith communities that surrounded them."¹⁹ An educated and well-trained local church develops a better understanding of its practice of mutual love and service among its members.

Trained to Exhibit Fruitful Faith in Christ

A definition of fruitful faith. When believers grow in their relationship with God and others, they develop a visible volitive faith that attracts others to experience the dynamics of love for God and one another. Felicity Williamson describes fruitful faith as the abundant life that Jesus, the good Shepherd, offers to all believers: "Abundant life is

¹⁹ Felicity B. Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul*, 2nd ed. (St-Louis: Chalice, 2015), 7.

known by its fruits: we feel more courageous, loving, and connected; better able to share our talents; and respectful of other persons and of the living systems that sustain us.”²⁰

Since fruitful faith is the outward expression of believers’ abundant life, one can imply that faith does develop. Indeed, faith does grow. Faith development is noticeable in believers by their fruit. In John 15:16, Jesus requires that believers “go and bear fruits.” Believers’ journey on earth must be an impactful life, which is the image of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Beloved children of God must imitate their Father (Eph 5:1).

Believers display the fruit of the Spirit when they cultivate true and sincere love in their life as a community of saints. Such a fruit is the manifestation of “one another love” (1 John 3:11). In John 15:16, Jesus declares, “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.” He also says, “People will know that [believers] are [his] disciples, if [they] have a love for one another” (John 13:35).

Love can best be defined as the manifestation of believers’ good wishes toward their neighbor. Matthew 7:12 encapsulates the truth in the definition of love mentioned earlier. If believers can love one another the same way they love themselves, then the manifestation of good wishes for others will be contagious in the local church.

When believers are trained to live in harmony and exercise their gifts freely mutual love and service will abound. The telos of their works will always be to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12). Such a process requires that the body of Christ receives a proper training from gifted teachers that the Lord places in the local church.

Trained to Live in Harmony

Human behavior does not come out of a vacuum. Because the community of saints consists of regenerated men and women with a past social affiliation, one must understand that friction in communal life is inevitable. In the past, they were “alienated from the commonwealth” of the people of God (Eph 2:12). As such, they “walked

²⁰ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 9.

following the course of this world” (Eph 2:2). But in Christ they receive a new life (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore, they must receive adequate education to understand that they are no longer under the yoke of their old life. Regenerated people have their lives, molded-in Christ. Their newness of life creates in them a new walk guided by Jesus’ footsteps.

The world’s footsteps versus Jesus’ footsteps. Identifying patterns in human behavior can help believers better understand themselves and others.²¹ Kelcourse argues that “the forces of family, community and historical context forge and form us in powerful ways of which we are often only dimly aware.”²² Therefore, believers’ communal lives must not ignore these forces because they are integral parts of every human being. Under the guiding light of the Holy Spirit, the church must communicate to believers the adverse effect of the manifestation of the forces they inherited from their past life. When believers understand that they were created in the image of God, they see others through themselves and act toward others as themselves (Matt 7:12). In this regard, believers’ fruitful faith translates to their ability to love God and one another.

In Philippians 2:8, the apostle Paul delineates Christ’s humility through his obedience to the Father. As opposed to the world’s disobedient walk of trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2), believers must live a life of obedience to the Father in Christ. A life of obedience to God reflects believers’ love for the Father and one another. When believers develop a profound love for God, they are prone to cultivate mutual love in the local church.

Mutual love. Love is the capacity to interact with others without pre-existing conditions satisfying one selfish desire. The ability to love finds a significant part of its source from one’s parents. James Estep and Jonathan Kim believe that parents have an

²¹ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 14.

²² Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 14.

essential role in the transmission of love.²³ Such knowledge opens doors to the local church to promote family values among its members. When the local church trains parents to raise their children with love, its members cultivate a life of mutual respect among themselves.

Mutual respect. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus declares that believers are the light of the world. As such, believers possess the means to expose the reality of darkness. They understand their past actions and are resolute to walk in “newness of life” (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:23-24; Col 3:10). Kelcourse believes when people live a fruitful faith “it allows *them* to love and care, and it gives *them* a heart of wisdom.”²⁴ As a result, the church experiences God’s power through mutual respect.

Mutual respect is the fruit of humility in believers. Humble believers “count others more significant than themselves” (Phil 2:3). According to George Knight, individual and group respect go hand in hand. He asserts that believers must learn to “recognize and respect individuality, uniqueness, and personal worth of each person.”²⁵ When believers understand that each person is unique, they develop a heart of tolerance. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “tolerance” as “the disposition to be patient with or indulgent to the opinions or practices of others.”²⁶ Lack of respect for others is a sign of insecurity in a person. The insecure mind attacks good character to satisfy insecurity.

Animosity among believers is the fruit of insecurity. Believers oppose one another to leverage positions in the local church. Such a behavior is a lack of humility in believers. Paul urges believers to “do nothing by selfish ambition or conceit but in

²³ James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 170.

²⁴ Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation*, 37.

²⁵ George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 203.

²⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), s.v. “tolerance.”

humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). Humility is a catalyst that facilitates a harmonious life in the body of Christ.

Humble believers reject animosity because whatever they do, they do it for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Hostility finds its source in a deceitful heart. A heart that believes that it is always right in its volition. As such, others must bow down before it. People who nurture such a heart elevate themselves in gods; they become enemies of Yahweh (Isa 42:8; 44:6-7). The remedy for a deceitful heart is to have the law of God written on it (Jer 31:33) so that it can walk in God’s statutes through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jer 36:27).

Trained to Exhibit the Merciful Heart of God

According to Allison, mutual love in the church generates acts of mercy.²⁷ There is an interdependence between love and mercy. When mutual love finds its place in a local church, it always appeals to mercy when trespasses are registered. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “mercy” as “the disposition to forgive or show compassion.”²⁸ Mercy is the ability to restrain from acting upon the trespasses of others. It is indeed a communicable attribute of the moral attributes of God.²⁹ Given that God is merciful, believers ought to be also. Mercy must invade all areas of believers’ lives.

Grudem asserts that believers “need to imitate God’s mercy in their conduct towards others.”³⁰ To corroborate his assertion, he cites one of Christ’s beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7) to emphasize the importance of mercy among the saints.

²⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 470.

²⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “mercy.”

²⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

³⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

Fruitful faith may serve as a thermometer to gauge the love temperature in a church family. The higher the love temperature goes in the local church, the more invasive the acts of mercy are in its members' midst. Wherever love abounds, there is not only the act of mercy but also acts of sharing. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son." When God shares the life of his begotten Son with humanity, he shows how deep and profound his love is. As sons and daughters of the living God, believers should love as their Father (Eph 5:1-2).

Faith through giving and sharing. Acts of mercy involve mutual forgiveness and a life of sharing. Allison ascertains that the church's acts of mercy utterly and powerfully proclaim the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ: "Giving is an act of submission that results from the confession of the gospel; that is, as the church lives out his profession of the good news, it becomes a giving community."³¹ Such acts proclaim the gospel and powerfully testify to the fellowship of the faith community.

Furthermore, believers' mutual aid propagates mutual love in the faith community. Such visible acts sometimes speak louder than the Word itself. When mutual aid is pervasive in the local church, it reveals that love among the saints is also genuine.³² Scripture reveals that active faith always accompanies good deeds because "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:17). Believers' mutual aid is an indicator of active faith. Accordingly, James asserts, "As the body apart from the Spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (Jas 2:26).

Consequently, believers' mutual aid makes public their mutual love to the community of faith and non-believers. Such testimony is essential to proclaim God's kingdom to non-believers, for they are watching the church's ethical activities—moral

³¹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 449.

³² Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 450.

walk. A life of mutual love and service always leads to a powerful proclamation of the Word.

Trained to Share God’s Merciful Act of Grace

A Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church is essential to effectively proclaim God’s kingdom to non-believers. The proclamation of God’s kingdom among the nations is one of the most crucial responsibilities of the church. God’s merciful act of grace must be a living testimony in believers’ lives. When asked by the Pharisees about the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus promptly replied, “The kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20-21). The church is the body of Christ—the people of the kingdom. They interact every day with the people of this world. Therefore, believers’ walk in this world testifies powerfully to the nature of God’s kingdom.

The apostle Peter writes to the twelve tribes in dispersion to urge them to “conduct themselves with fear throughout the time of their exile” (1 Pet 1:17). He emphasizes the importance of the believer’s walk among non-believers. Peter’s understanding of the church’s mission (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) makes him fully aware and sensitive of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He intentionally bypasses the sufferings of these believers in exile to address the importance of a worthy walk with Christ.

Believers’ holy walk. Peter reminds believers of the importance of holiness in their walk with Christ when he quotes Leviticus 11:44 “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” declares the Holy One—God (1 Pet 1:15-16). According to Peter, believers’ holiness must be practical and visible to nonbelievers. He goes on to say that “as obedient children, [believers must] not be conformed to the passions of their former ignorance” (1 Pet 1:14).

Believers’ morality and psychoanalysis. One should consider the psychoanalysis aspect of the believer’s walk with Christ. In 1 Peter 1: 13, Peter addresses

believers' state of mind in their walk with Christ. Peter urges believers to prepare their minds for action (1 Pet 1: 13). The Greek word ἀναζώννυμι, which translates to “prepare your minds,” means to gird up. Actions speak louder than words. Believers' actions can make a positive or a negative impact on those surrounding them. Because humans are created in the *imago Dei*, they have an interconnection.

Along the same lines, Kelcourse states, “At the center of each person is the soul, accessible to us both consciously and unconsciously.”³³ She suggests that consciousness is the “eye,” and the unconsciousness is the “soul.” The eye of the unconsciousness is the *imago Dei*. The soul reacts to the impactful behavior of an individual or a group on others. The *imago Dei* connects people in a way that surpasses human understanding. Kelcourse's diagrams of the “Hypothetical Flow of Human of Spiritual Energy in Worship” can also be used to describe the connection between humans (individuals or groups).

C. S. Lewis believes that Christian morality and psychoanalysis techniques do not contradict, although they run different courses.³⁴ Morality is God's set of principles for his creature to live. Failure to live according to these principles will result in catastrophic consequences. A set of principles always guides decision-making, whether someone consciously or unconsciously applies of them. The way people make a decision is relative to their judgment, and judgment is controlled by cognitive and affective functions of the dynamics of the heart.

Volitive judgment. Non-Christians judge the church by its actions. Lewis illustrates the judgmental approach of non-Christians toward Christians' behavior when he states, “Just as an illness ‘feeling better is not much good if the thermometer shows

³³ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 70.

³⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 88.

that your temperature is still going up.”³⁵ If the church’s actions continue to contradict its preaching, then the church is not walking its “talk.” The impact of the church’s actions on non-Christians gravitates the latter toward disbelief. According to Christ, “A tree is judged by its fruit” (Luke 6:43-45).

Lewis comes alongside Christ’s declaration to say, “When we Christians misbehave or fail to behave well, we are making Christianity unbelievable to the outside world.”³⁶ The church’s volition—power to choose to behave in harmony with God’s Word or to follow the train of the world—can magnetize the world to bring them toward God or push them away from God.

Believers must understand the consequences of their actions in this world and follow Paul’s exhortation to “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls them in his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12). Such awareness must be at the center of Christ-centered unity in the local church. What message does Paul want to convey to his readers in the aforementioned text? Lewis strikingly deciphers the message when he states, “Our careless lives set the outer world talking, and we give them grounds for talking in a way that throws doubt on the truth of Christianity itself.”³⁷ Since Christians’ behavior can positively or negatively impact the outer world, their formation must consider the conscious and subconscious behavior of humans’ development—one of the tools available to believers to promote their faith in the Christian virtues.

Christian virtues. Virtue is an inherent character that needs nurturing to produce desired results. Sustaining an ethical work environment requires both individual and organizational efforts. However, fostering an environment that promotes positive emotions can potentially trigger virtue.

³⁵ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 200.

³⁶ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 207.

³⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 208.

Christians who grow up in the loving care of Christian parents and a united church family are more apt to develop a positive image of God if their parents' profession of faith reflects God's love for humans. It is clear, writes Kelcourse, that "beginning in infancy and throughout early childhood, our god-images form and are based not only on what we are told about God but also, and more essentially, on the love we receive or fail to receive from those who care for us."³⁸ Based on Kelcourse's deduction on moral and faith development during infancy, it is wise for the church to build a curriculum to promote the virtue of love in Christians' life. Such a promotion must be pervasive in all ministries of the church.

Along the same lines, the book of Proverbs teaches believers to "train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (22:6). The following section will show the importance of fostering an intergenerational work of ministry in the local church. Such a ministry must prioritize the notion of a family-equipped church—a church where ministry starts before conception of a child through marriage counseling until their death. The church must develop a strategic plan for a family-equipped church to accomplish this goal.

**A Christ-Centered United Local Church Trains Its
Members to Experience God's Power
in Every Aspect of Life**

When the church tailors its education curriculum to teach members the ways of the Lord, they must train believers to practice Christian virtues as a lifestyle and not heavy yokes they ought to bear to please God. Believers' hearts must continuously draw on the knowledge of the Word to walk daily in the ways of the Lord (Ps 128:1). Such training will enormously help believers' psychological and cognitive changes in their walk with the Lord.

³⁸ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 75.

Trained to Walk in the Ways of the Lord

Kelcourse believes that “psychological and cognitive changes” affect every stage of human life.³⁹ From an early age, people develop a bonding love for their caregivers. She explains, “The first year of life is critical to secure emotional attachment.”⁴⁰ People’s cognitive learning is controlled by their affection in early development ages. That explains Kelcourse deduction when she states, “Beginning in infancy and throughout early childhood, our god-images form and are based not only on what we are told about God but also, and more essentially, on the love we receive or fail to receive from those who care for us.”⁴¹

Humans’ development process is imitative. A research study conducted by Zhidan Wang, Rebecca A. Williamson, and Andrew N. Meltzoff shows that imitation plays a significant role in humans’ cognitive development. At the end of their research, they conclude, “Children learn about the social and physical world by observing other people’s acts. . . . The ability to learn from others’ actions sets our species apart.”⁴² What sets humans’ imitation apart from other species is that they can “reproduce not only the overall outcomes or end-states that others achieve with objects but also the precise means to attain them.”⁴³

Because people can follow the means of achievable goals scrupulously, they can faithfully replicate others’ actions and even improve their effectiveness to the benefit of everyone. Wang, Williamson, and Meltzoff suggest that “instrumental innovations and social routines can spread through communities through imitation, thereby leading these

³⁹ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 15.

⁴⁰ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 74.

⁴¹ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 75.

⁴² Zhidan Wang, Rebecca A. Williamson, and Andrew N. Meltzoff, “Imitation as a Mechanism in Cognitive Development: A Cross-Cultural Investigation of 4-Year-Old Children’s Rule Learning,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, May 13, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00562>.

⁴³ Wang, Williamson, and Meltzoff, “Imitation as a Mechanism.”

behaviors to be maintained across generations and providing more opportunities for cumulative progress.”⁴⁴ Believers idem can share the gospel through imitation. Therefore, believers’ behavior and actions are powerful constructs for a lasting and reproducible faith.

Imitators of God. Believers are called to be imitators of God because they are God’s children (1 John 3:1-2). Their walk must reflect God’s communicable attributes. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul appeals to them to imitate God in their walk (5:1). He says that believers are “to walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (5:2). Believers must not only walk in love but exhibit sacrificial love in their relationship with their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ demonstrated this sacrificial love for believers when he gave his life on the cross to redeem believers from the bondage of sin. Such a sacrifice is the proof of his love for believers. Sacrificial love is not verbatim but is a concrete action for the benefit of others. In John 10:11, Jesus states, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” That Jesus lays down his life for believers qualifies him as the “good shepherd.” This project aimed not to demonstrate the modeling effect of a good shepherd but instead to decode the excellent attribute in the shepherding function of Christ to provide a path to believers to share the gospel through their love to one another.

Believers do not regurgitate sacrificial love in their relationships with one another, but they have a living example that propends them toward a sacrificial love of walk in their Christian journey on earth. For believers to develop such volitive behavior, they must grow in a suitable environment to cultivate mutual love. The local church culture is vital in believers’ faith development. One does not develop into a mature believer without the help of their environment.

⁴⁴ Wang, Williamson, and Meltzoff, “Imitation as a Mechanism.”

Christian values. In her research on faith development, Kelcourse reports, “In observing each’s baby development, what mattered most for the normal maturation of skills was responsive, predictable, and consistent care according to one’s community and cultural values.”⁴⁵ Allison believes that a biblical and theological illiteracy in local churches hinders believers’ faith development and argues, “Biblical and theological illiteracy on the part of both those who preach and those who listen to the preaching leads to a shallowness in messages, which only contributes more to the root illiteracy problem.”⁴⁶

Accordingly, the local church must take Christian education seriously to equip its members to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Allison considers the seriousness of Christian education in the local church, he exclaims, “For education to avail for discipleship, it must be Christian education.”⁴⁷ An education that is “doctrinally sound and theologically driven disciples (orthodoxy).”⁴⁸ The educational ministry of the local church must aim to develop “Christlike disciples who faithfully and obediently engage in good works for the glory of God.”⁴⁹ To this end, trained believers will exhibit the “orthopraxis—the love of Christ and others.”

Trained to Live as Brothers and Sisters

According to Reinhold Niebuhr, “Christian view of man is that he is understood primarily from the standpoint of God, rather than the uniqueness of his rational faculties or relation to nature.”⁵⁰ Thus, believers must understand that they

⁴⁵ Kelcourse, *Human Development and Faith*, 139.

⁴⁶ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 435.

⁴⁷ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 441.

⁴⁸ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 442.

⁴⁹ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 442.

⁵⁰ Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 204.

belong to God’s family. As such, “they are partakers of the divine nature”⁵¹ and possess in them some attributes of God that empower them to love and act with justice in relationship with others.⁵²

Believers have the “ability to communicate and develop a relationship with their creator [and their neighbors]. . . . Humans at the creation are pictured as beings of love, goodness, trustworthiness, rationality, and righteousness.”⁵³ To retrain believers as regenerate beings—rendered to their initial conditions—the local church does not require the miraculous work of God such as the parting of the Red Sea, but a return to the person and the work of Christ (Rom 5:19).

To successfully bring believers to pre-fall condition, the corrupted image depicted in Genesis 3 must undergo a remolding process—new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Along the same lines, Gene Garrick points out, “There can be no truly Christian mind without the new birth since spiritual truth is apprehended and applied spiritually (1 Cor. 2:1-16).”⁵⁴

As discussed in chapter 2, believers must understand that God has chosen them to be new beings in Christ and that they have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are no longer slaves of sin (Rom 6:15-23). Such a belief must be at the core of Christian training for Christ-centered unity in the local church.

The belief that works. “Do not disbelieve, but believe,” Jesus replied to Thomas when he demanded to touch Jesus’ wounds before he could believe Jesus had been resurrected (John 20:27). Do you believe it? Jesus asks Thomas while admonishing him to side with the blessed ones. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have

⁵¹ Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 204.

⁵² Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 205.

⁵³ Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 205.

⁵⁴ Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 210.

believed” (John 20:28). Once believers anchor their belief in God’s everlasting love for them, they will, in turn, love one another.

The mark of true disciples of Christ. Jesus teaches believers that love surpasses every other attribute God shares with them. Love for God and neighbors summarizes the whole Christian life (Matt 22:37-40). He further teaches believers that love for one another is a visible mark of their association with him (John 13:34-35). Believers testify the love of God for them when they, in turn, profess love to one another. Such testimony is a powerful way to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus declares, “By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have a love for one another” (John 13:35).

Authentic and genuine unity in the local church. How does one arrive at the conclusion that unity manifests in the midst of a congregation? The answer lies in the evidence provided by believers’ love for one another. Such love is the evidence of believers’ worthy walk with Christ (Eph 4:1-6).

Even though the word evidence is open to interpretation, Paul leaves no room for debate when adding the qualifier “worthy” before “believers’ walk” (v. 1). Paul’s introduction clarifies that circumstances cannot determine believers’ perception of unity. As a prisoner, Paul strongly urges believers to look outside the box of individualistic Christianity. He encourages believers to imitate God in love as beloved children (Eph 5:1). Such an imitation must find its source in Christ. Believers must love one another as “Christ loved them and gave himself up for them” (Eph 5:2).

Conclusion

Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church is feasible and beneficial to propagate the gospel of Christ. When the Lord prayed for believers to be one as he is one with his Father (John 17:11), he knew that unity was possible in the local church. However, this unity must be in him and through him. The proper model of unity is the

unity of the triune God. Because believers belong to God, they possess the capacity to practice Christ-centered biblical unity in their relationships. Genuine love for God catalyzes authentic Christ-centered biblical united local church (Matt 22:37-40).

When believers understand that they are members of the same body, they develop a more profound love for one another. Believers' obedience to the Word of God stimulates growth of the church because the Holy Spirit guides their lifestyles and relationships with one another. When believers cultivate Christ-centered biblical unity, they can act as "one body" to carry out God's command to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Such a culture requires vigorous training to renew believers' minds to live a transformed life in Christ Jesus (Rom 12:2). Training must be holistic and consider all stages of human development to better prepare believers to reproduce Christ's love in their lives together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Stephen Hildebrand points out, "In the common life, all of us have been gathered up in the one hope to which we were called (Eph 4:4) [and] we are one body having Christ as head and we are members of the others (Rom 12:5)."⁵⁵ The implication of having Christ as head of the "one body" is humongous because it empowers believers and the local church to benefit from God's power in the work of all its ministries. It also strengthens believers' faith in Christ through mutual love and service.

⁵⁵ Stephen M. Hildebrand, *Basil of Caesarea: Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 127.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the execution of a twenty-four-week project at Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale (BBCF) and outlines the training program that promoted intergenerational unity. This curriculum included six weeks of preparation, fifteen weeks of implementation of Christ-centered biblical unity to practice intergeneration unity in the local church, and (3) three weeks of evaluation. The project was executed from April 2021 to April 2022.

Preparation

The preparation of the materials emanated mainly from apostle Paul’s guidance on the unity of the body of Christ (Eph 1-5; 1 Cor 12). The project implementation followed two years of research on intergenerational biblical unity in the local church. During the two-year study, on-campus doctoral seminars provided substantial help in determining the approach to address the problem of unity in the local church and the best route to have a progressive and sustainable solution.

Because the topic of church unity concerns the entire congregation of the local church, I developed a two-approach system of teaching and preaching. I chose these approaches because the sermon series only would be insufficient to address the problem of unity in the local church. Therefore, a lesson series went hand-in-hand with the sermon series to better address the *bien-fondé*¹ of biblical unity in the local church.

Alongside preparing teaching and preaching materials, I assessed the core membership of BBCF. The church leadership—pastorate, and diaconate took the

¹ Pierre Larousse, *Dictionnaire de Français* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 2016), s.v. “bien fondé.”

assessment initiative. The deacons and deaconesses kicked off the project with a prayer session to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. The project became personal for the church leadership because they had experienced the detriment of disunity in the church a few months before the start of this project. A significant schism resulted from a lack of knowledge on gifts endowment split the church. This experience motivated the leaders to help the church understand biblical unity correctly to prevent such disasters in the future. They quickly realized that they needed to “go to Gemba”² to effectively address the problem of unity in the church.

Database of Active Membership

The core membership is the engine of the local church. Any component malfunction of the body will be flagged by a check engine light, indicating that the core membership does not function properly. Understanding this aspect of the local church is particularly important in addressing disunity in the church. Therefore, the assessment participants needed to depict the valid core membership of the church. Under the church’s constitution, the leadership defines the core membership. One of the requirements is the assiduity of the member (Acts 2:42).

Week 1: Active Members Database

According to BBCF’s constitution, active members are those who attend church at least three times a month and regularly participate in monthly church business meetings. They also must be involved in Sunday school or small group activities in the church. The pastor and the deacons can help create such a list because they are the ones watching over the flock. After evaluation of the core members, the leaders agreed on 125 members to be on the list of active members. Immediately after the preparation of the

² “Going to Gemba’ is the act of visiting the shop floor in Lean and Kaizen. Literally translates as ‘the real place.’

core members list, they notified the members that they were selected to participate in the project.

Week 2: Commitment forms

The panel contacted the active members to inform them of the project. After giving an overview of the project, they gave the chosen members a commitment form to confirm participation in the project. They told participants that the commitment form would serve as an agreement to fully complete the sermon series and the lessons on biblical unity in the local church. The panel distributed both forms to confirm the members' willful agreement to participate in the project.³ Eighty active members completed, signed, and returned both commitment forms to the panel to confirm their acceptance to participate in the project.

Week 3: Prepare Sermon Series and Lessons on Christ-Centered Biblical Unity

I built a list and definition of all the materials used to prepare the sermon series and lessons. I considered the Bible and Christian authors as primary sources for research. The framework of this preparation came from academic studies on the subject matter. After careful study and research, I prepared a sermon series and lessons on biblical Christ-centered unity. Then, I submitted all manuscripts and lesson plan to the panel for review and approval.

Week 4: Complete Sermon Series and Lessons on Christ-Centered Biblical Unity

To ensure the sermon series and lessons were practical to promote unity in the local church, I met separately with six pastors in the community to discuss and review the

³ See appendix 1. The average attendance at BBCF on Sunday morning is about 130. More than 90 of these attendees are adult members.

sermon series and lessons. The pastors were anxious to know the project's result because they believed that such a project would be beneficial for their congregations. After the meetings, I reviewed and analyzed the recommendations made by the pastors. I realized that parts of the pastors' advice would be highly effective for the project's success.

Week 5: Sermon Series and Lessons Approval

I submitted the final lesson plan and outlines of the sermon series to the panel for review and approval. They reviewed both plans for doctrinal soundness according to the church's statement of beliefs. The panel also considered another critical aspect of the lesson plan: ease of teaching. Because three Sunday school teachers took part in the teaching of the first three lessons, I needed to put the lessons into the same format as existing Sunday school lessons. After review, the panel approved the sermon series and lessons plan on intergenerational biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church.

Week 6: Materials Readiness

After the approbation of the panel to move forward with the sermon series and lesson plan, I revised all materials, documentation, presentation, and logistics for accuracy before distributing the Believer Biblical Unity Inventory (BBUI) survey forms to participants. The survey aimed to evaluate the members' knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. I surveyed the sermon series and lessons on biblical unity to gauge the understanding of the members on the subject matter. I repeated the survey after completing the sermon series and lessons with the same members who took the survey before running a *t*-test for statical analysis to determine if there was a positive, significant difference between the pre-and post-survey results.

Implementation

I trained three Sunday school teachers to teach the first three lessons. I also allocated weeks 7 and 8 to prepare the Sunday school teachers. I distributed the pre-series

survey form to the participants with a due date on week 8. I informed participants that failure to return the form on time would disqualify them from participating in the project. I also communicated that the pre-project survey would assess their understanding and practices of biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. Lastly, I asked participants to commit to hold themselves accountable for the duration of the twelve-week sermon series and lessons.

Weeks 7 and 8: Surveys Collection and Training

I collected the pre-series forms and provided the last training session to the Sunday school teachers before they started teaching the lessons. At the end of the training on week 8, I added two more sessions for the teachers to elaborate on specific issues that need more attention. Because the teachers were also participants in the project, I wanted to ensure that they understood the lessons correctly.

Week 9: Official Kickoff, Lesson 1, and Sermon 1

Week 9 was the official kickoff week of the project. Around 8:45 a.m., participants enthusiastically gathered in the main sanctuary to attend the project launch. The chairperson of the panel opened the meeting with a hymn, followed by a Scripture reading of Ephesians 4:1-6. Next, the senior pastor led the meeting in prayer to officially pave the way for the project's kickoff.

Following the pastor's opening prayer, I thanked the participants for their willingness to learn more about biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. I added, "When the church cultivates such a unity, God's kingdom on earth becomes an irresistible influencer to earthly kingdoms." I also thanked the Sunday school teachers for taking the challenge to be part of the noble task of building the foundation for an effective and lasting biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church.

Immediately after the introduction, the Sunday school teachers started the first lesson on Christ-centered biblical unity to address the source of believers' calling. The focus of the study was to demonstrate why God has chosen believers to be part of his kingdom. Ephesians 1:3-10 shows that God chose believers to walk holy and blameless before him (v. 4). Such a walk proclaims God's glory on earth because it reflects the holiness of God. Furthermore, 1 Peter 1:16 reminds believers that they must be holy as God himself is holy. Believers' holiness is a trait that indicates their belonging to the holy God. Therefore, believers ought to understand that they represent God on earth. God chose believers to form a holy nation—the people of God (1 Pet 2:9). God's people must live a corporate life of holiness. Those who receive the call must be part of a local church to live this corporate life of holiness.

As the class progressed, students got involved, and the lesson came alive. The interactive study made the one-hour class of the first session go by quickly. Students asked several essential questions about the nature of the choice that God made of them. Some students did not understand the process of salvation. They believed that they played a vital role in choosing to be part of God's family when they accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. The teachers made it clear that salvation is the grace of God (Eph 2:8). God's irresistible grace opens believers' hearts to accept the sacrifice of the cross as the sole means of salvation. The teachers dismissed the class with joy and excitement, looking forward to meeting again the next week.

The first sermon series on Christ-centered unity in the local church was titled "By Grace Not by Works," and aimed to show believers that their salvation is the ingenious work of God alone (Eph 2). The sermon addressed five key aspects of believers' salvation: (1) their past conditions (vv. 1-2a); (2) their past position (vv. 2b-3); (3) God's intervention (vv. 4-5); (4) their present position (v. 6); and (5) their current conditions (vv. 7-10).

**Week 10: Lesson 2 and Sermon 2—
Understand What It Means to Walk
in Unity with the Triune God**

The second week of the project implementation was crucial for the remaining lessons and sermon series because it laid the foundation of Christ-centered biblical unity. Understanding Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church requires a clear understanding of believers' union with the triune God. Ephesians 2:1-22 explains that believers are created for good works and should walk in them.

Lesson 2 demonstrated how believers walk in unity with the triune God by displaying the triple circle of unity of the triune God: Jesus Christ, the Son, proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. Therefore, believers enjoy the benefits of the love of the Father in the Son through the Spirit.

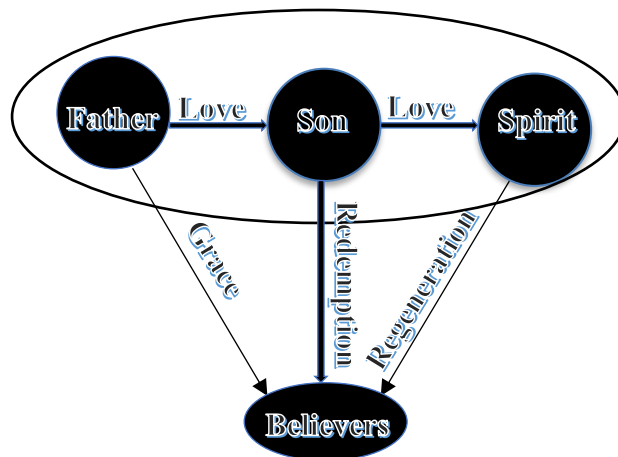


Figure 1. Believers' union with the triune God

The first part of the lesson addressed believers' position in Christ. I demonstrated that, outside of Christ, there could not be unity with the triune God. According to Ephesians 2:1-3, those who are not in Christ walk in disobedience and are children of wrath. That was the past condition of believers—walking in darkness. However, the great love of God manifested his grace in Christ by the regenerative work of the Spirit to make believers children of light. The process of regeneration raised numerous questions from the participants because God, the Father, initiated the salvific work of believers, not

the Son. The lesson clarified the process of salvation by referring to John 3:16. The reference verse shows that the depth of the love of the Father overflows to believers in the Son.

This lesson also clarified the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of believers' salvation. The redeeming work of the Son is only possible through the Holy Spirit. Believers become part of the kingdom of God when they are born of the Spirit (John 3:5-6). Thus, believers enjoy the fellowship of the triune God with their new birth. Such a mystery makes people believe that believers enjoy this benefit because of the redeeming work of Christ that leads to the work of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Believers must walk in holiness, for they are wholly part of the triune God. Because believers belong to the triune God's family, the apostle Peter urges them to "be holy, for God is holy" (1 Pet 1:15-16).

The hour of the class went by quickly again because of the full participation of the class. I reminded students to continue their study of the main text, Ephesians 2:1-22, and noted any questions they might have about the redeeming work of Christ and the regenerating work of the Spirit. I dismissed the class in prayer.

Sermon 2 addressed two fundamental aspects of believers' sonship: the eternal love of God and the redeeming work of Christ. The first aspect of believers' sonship demonstrated that (1) God's love initiated his immeasurable mercy to believers (vv. 1-7); (2) God's love released his unilateral grace toward believers for their salvation (vv. 8-9); and (3) God's love prepared believers to walk in good works (v. 10). The second aspect of believers' sonship revealed three productive works of the redeeming blood of Christ: (1) Christ's redeeming work brought believers closer to God (vv. 1-13); (2) Christ's redeeming work reconciled believers with God (vv. 13-18); and (3) Christ's redeeming work made believers members of the house of God—children of God (vv. 19-22).

To conclude sermon 2, I asked the congregation to answer three questions: (1) did you deserve God's grace?, (2) who initiated the work of reconciliation between

the Father and believers?, and (3) do you know that you belong to the same household as your siblings in Christ? Scripture teaches believers to grow into a holy temple of God, and believers must knit together in Christ and let the Holy Spirit transform them into a dwelling place of God (vv. 20-22).

Week 11: Lesson 3 and Sermon 3—How to Cultivate a Worthy Walk in Christ

Lesson 3 and sermon 3 addressed how the local church can cultivate a worthy walk with Christ. Ephesians 5:15-21 and Galatians 5:16-26 outline several steps the local church must take to cultivate this worthy walk. For the local church to cultivate a worthy walk with Christ, its members must first surrender their lives entirely to the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Holy Spirit will guide them in all the truth (John 16:13), enable them to know the will of God (John 14:26), and reproduce God’s character in their lives. According to Gordon D. Fee, the reproduction of God’s character is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Second, the local church must walk in love as Christ has loved (Eph 5:2). Scripture teaches that Christ showed his love when he first left his throne to lower himself, “being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7), and willingly gave his life on the cross to pay the ultimate price for believers’ salvation (1 Cor 15:3). Jesus, the good Shepherd, declares that “greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Sermon 3 addressed three essential steps toward a worthy walk with Christ. Believers must learn first to love as Christ loves sinners and gave his life for them on the cross (1 John 3:16). This sacrificial gift is the greatest love that ever existed (John 15:13). Second, believers must cohabit with other believers despite their spiritual immaturity. When believers imitate Christ’s love, they bear with one another with a merciful heart (Luke 6:36; Eph 4:32; Col 3:12-14). Third, they must forgive others as Christ forgives

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 106.

(Col 3:13b). According to Matthew 6:14-15, forgiving one another is the prerequisite for believers to receive God's forgiveness for their trespasses.

As sermon 3 ended, the response from the congregation me because of the many testimonies. They felt blessed and thanked me for the sermon. It was a blessed day! The joy of the congregants testified the manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Week 12: Lesson 4 and Sermon 4—
Believers' Servanthood Attitude;
Key Indices of their Love
for Christ**

Lesson 4 addressed three important relational aspects in believers' servanthood attitude. First, when believers profess the Lord's servanthood attitude, they regard others above themselves. Their respect for others does not belittle them but reveals their remarkable character. The apostle Paul encourages believers to do so in all humility by "counting others more significant than themselves" (Phil 2:3b). Second, they serve with joy. They understand that the service they render to others is for the glory of God. Third, they imitate Jesus's servanthood attitude. The Lord Jesus Christ emptied himself when he laid aside his divinity to become human (Phil 2:7). Believers who take Jesus Christ as their golden service sample understand that they must serve sacrificially. Therefore, they must reject lordship and authoritative leadership styles (Matt 20:25).

During the class, a flood of questions emerged considering the type of today's church leaders. The students expressed their confusion regarding the teaching of Jesus and the local church leaders' behavior. Jesus teaches not to rule as the leaders of this world. Believers shall not lord or exercise authority over their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (Matt 20:25-26). A young brother asked a poignant question that took the class's attention: "Why is it that so many people are fighting for position in the church?" The desire to serve in itself is not wrong, but the intent will display itself when the laborer is actually working in the field.

Church leaders carry a heavy responsibility because they are souls' caregivers. I expounded the sermon's truth by underscoring three types of leaders that Jesus addresses in the text. The first one is the worldly leader. The aim of these leaders is to lord over their subjects. The success of their rulership resides in their authoritative style to elevate their great names. The second is the spiritual leader. This type of leader is the opposite of the former because they serve others instead of lording over them. They serve to please their master, Jesus Christ. The last type of leader Jesus addressed in the text is the eternal leader. He is the model ruler; he came to serve, not to be served; and he gave his life as a ransom for his people (Matt 20:28).

In concluding week 12, participants voiced their lack of understanding of service in the church. They believed that church rulers today rule as worldly rulers. They also believed that the main objective of most church leaders is to build their own kingdom using believers as their servants. The lesson was an eye-opener for members who took part in the program. Week 12 concluded with a renewed commitment of the participants to live a life of mutual service in the local church.

Week 13: Lesson 5 and Sermon 5— Necessary Tools to Maintain Unity in the Local Church

The aim of lesson 5 was to equip members of the with necessary tools to maintain unity of the Spirit in the local church. Each instrument was designed to serve as a guide to establish a Christ-centered relationship among believers in the local church. Both lesson 5 and sermon 5 were sourced from Colossians 3:12–15 and Matthew 7:12. Colossians 3:12-15 contains eight essential tools for believers to live harmoniously in the local church. The first seven tools require the support of “love,” the eighth tool, to perform their task in a Christ-centered relationship efficiently. To sustain Christ-centered unity, believers must continuously assess, correct, and improve their skills with the tools the Holy Spirit endowed to them to maintain unity in the church.

Lesson 5 gave an overview of the eight tools God endows to believers to maintain a Christ-centered unity in the local church. I asked participants to read Colossians 3:12-15 and come up with their own list. They also had to briefly explain each tool and the importance of its use in Christ-centered unity.

In sermon 5, I demonstrated three benefits the local church enjoys when they effectively use the tools God provides for Christ-centered unity. First, they worship God in harmony. Their accord creates an atmosphere for a continual presence of the living God in their midst (John 14:23). Second, they serve one another with joy. Their compassionate hearts propel a desire in them to care for one another. Last, their testimonies draw the community near them to seek the God they are worshiping. The relationship between the church and the community is vital to convey the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ effectively. When the church serves its community, it proclaims Yahweh's love and compassionate heart.

At the end of the sermon, I challenged the church to make effective use of the biblical Christ-centered unity tools that they have at their disposal. Failure not to act on it has severe consequences and reproaches at the hands of the Master (Matt 25:31-46). The time to work is now!

**Week 14: Lesson 6—Compassion, a Heart
for Those in Distress and the
Desire to Relieve It**

The previous lesson challenged participants to glean evidence of Christ-centered unity tools from the text in Colossians 3:12-15. Each student was required to come with a list of their own. I asked three volunteers to present their work and a brief summary of each tool they identified in their gleaning process. Some came up with a list of six tools instead of eight. They believed that humility and meekness form one tool; and bearing with one another and patience are also one tool. At least 40 percent of the class seemed to agree with their findings. I encouraged the students to save their work and promised to come back to the discussion at the end of lesson 14.

The lesson accentuated the compassionate heart element of the Christ-centered unity tools. Compassion is a communicable attribute of the triune God. When believers show compassionate in their relationship, they profess the love of God in their community. Jesus’s ministry on earth was full of compassionate acts. I demonstrated in the lesson that uncompassionate believers do not know Christ because they do not possess the essential attribute that Scripture uses as the epithet of Jesus, the compassionate Lord.

The session ended with a Q&A segment where I discussed practical aspects of compassion with the students. After the discussion, I distributed the lecture handouts on the second tool—kindness. I dismissed the class with a prayer.

Week 15: Lesson 7—Kindness, the Gentleness of Attitude and Behavior in Dealing with Others

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin states that God often reminds believers of his kindness when he convicts them of ingratitude when they fail to make a suitable return.⁵ When kindness is absent in believers’ attitudes toward others, they testify that they are not children of the loving-kindness God.

The main objective of this lesson was to demonstrate that believers’ kindness mirrors the loving-kindness of Yahweh. As such, believers must exhibit this divine virtue as a propulsive force of their love for God. Believers’ kindness to others is a return path of God’s loving-kindness to them. I delineated this virtue as the willful desire to “do good to everyone, especially to those in the house faith” (Gal 6:10). It is also to be sought by “not repaying anyone evil for evil” (1 Thess 5:15).

The recommendation of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 prompted a flood of questions from participants. To answer these questions, I reframed the discussion around the lecture notes while emphasizing the adjective “gracious” in the definition of

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 291.

“kindness.” I made it clear to the participants that the kindness believers show to others, despite their behavior, is an overflow of the loving-kindness of God to them. St. Basil of Caesarea declares, “They celebrate by deed the kindness which *they* have experienced *from the Creator*, and not return thanks by word only.”⁶ The session ended with the distribution of the handout for the next lesson on humility and meekness. I encouraged participants to use the lesson they learned on kindness in dealing with one another effectively.

**Week 16: Lesson 8—Humility and Meekness,
Mildness of Disposition, Gentleness of
Believer’s Spirit in Dealing
with One Another**

The previous lesson demonstrated that believers’ kindness is an overflow of God’s loving-kindness to them. Lesson 8 emphasized the benefits of humility in believers’ relationship with one another in the local church. One of the benefits I highlighted in the lesson on humility was that believers fence their relationship with the rejection of the spirit of arrogance.

Because believers esteem others more highly than themselves, their attitude and actions toward others bolster their relationship with one another. Humility is not an act but a lifestyle of the Christian virtues (1 Pet 5:5). Peter exhorts believers to clothe themselves with humility toward one another. To explain the clothing concept, I drew from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* to build two case studies to exercise with the class.⁷ After the exercise, the response was overwhelming from all participants. They expressed their mishap for not going through such training before.

Another benefit the church enjoys from the spirit of humility in believers is the attitude of church leaders. They serve with humility instead of arrogance. Humble church

⁶ Philip Scaff, *The Complete Works of Saint Basil* (Toronto: Public Domain, 2016), 458.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 32.

leaders serve the church in the meekness of wisdom (Jas 3:13). I demonstrated to the class that meekness is not synonymous with stupidity, but a non-combative trait of believers, which empowers them to respond to aggressive people with kindness. Humble believers approach people with lowliness of heart and choose their words carefully when speaking. They know that “a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov 15:1). At the end of the session I challenged participants to practice humility and meekness in their relationships with one another. I ended the class with a word of prayer.

**Week 17: Lesson 9—Patience and Tolerance,
the Ability to Endure Uncomfortable Pain
Caused by Others’ Volitional Character**

This lesson increased believers’ disposition to be patient in dealing with others. The lesson addressed three critical aspects of patience in believers’ lives. First, patience removes the spirit of rejection in believers’ heart when others’ behavior seems unbearable. According to Curtis Heffelfinger, “To be patient is to be long-suffering—to stay cool, calm, and collected even when provoked.”⁸ Patience and tolerance are knitted together in believers’ heart to endure others’ sinful behavior.

Second, it stimulates the heart to pour its goodness out to others. Grudem explains that patience is one of the three aspects of God’s goodness alongside mercy and grace.⁹ Patience allows believers to withhold punishment against others’ repetitive offenses. It suppresses frustration in believers’ hearts when dealing with difficult people. I spent a great deal of time elaborating on how believers can cultivate a spirit of patience in their relationships. To end the session, I asked the participants to meditate on the following questions on patience and tolerance:

⁸ Curtis Heffelfinger, *The Peace Making Church: 8 Biblical Keys to Resolve Conflict and Preserve Unity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 44.

⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

1. Why must believers cultivate a heart of patience toward one another?
2. Is it feasible to endure insults with patience from someone continuously seeking to hurt you?
3. What is the aim of patience in believers' lives in dealing with one another?
4. Can a non-believer be patient? If yes, what makes natural placidity different from spiritual patience?
5. Can you cite three examples of longsuffering in Scripture that make you believe that patience is a confirmation of one's steadfast faith in God?

At the end of the session I reminded participants that patience is a concrete testimony of one's faith in Christ because it shows believers' dependency on God and the sacrificial love of believers to endure sufferings by relentlessly pursuing other believers' repentance through prayer. I reminded the students that the next session would put an end to the practical aspect of Christ-centered unity in the local church and then dismissed the class in prayer.

Week 18: Lesson 10—How to Practice Forgiveness

In the last session, I addressed the importance of being patient with one another. I pointed out that the aim of patience in believers is repentance, and repentance requires forgiveness. What exactly is forgiveness? *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “forgiveness” as “the act of granting pardon to someone, ceasing to feel resentment against someone, or canceling a debt.”¹⁰ Before further developing the practice of forgiveness, I asked the participants to share their understanding of forgiveness with the class. Three students stood up and gave clear and concise definitions of forgiveness. When I asked the class about the pivotal point of each definition, they replied: “let go of wrongdoings.”

The practice of forgiveness requires a better understanding of the action of forgiving. I explained the difference between positional and relational forgiveness. The first, positional forgiveness, relates to God's forgiveness of sin through the redemptive

¹⁰ *Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), s.v. “forgiveness.”

blood of Jesus Christ. And the latter relates to one's relationship with God and one another. Relational forgiveness requires first that believers forgive one another to benefit God's forgiveness (Matt 6:14-16). In other words, receiving forgiveness from God is conditional on granting forgiveness to others. The second one, relational forgiveness, is repentance from a transgressor for wrongdoings against others. Calvin states, "When God offers forgiveness of sins, he in return usually stipulates for repentance."¹¹ I gave several examples from the Scriptures to demonstrate the truth about God's stipulation for repentance. When God offered forgiveness to trespassers, he always stipulated repentance for granting that forgiveness (Isa 55:7; Acts 3:19).

Next, a series of questions followed from the students concerning true repentance: (1) how do we know if someone is truly repentant? (2) can someone abuse repentance by committing the same sin repeatedly? and (3) why is it so difficult for people to repent from their sins? I concluded the lesson by showing that repentance is neither the foundation nor the merit to receive forgiveness, but a medium. After completing the questions and answers section on the handout, I announced that there would be one last session the following week to conclude the lessons and to re-administer the BBUI survey. The post-project survey was designed to gauge the participants' understanding of biblical Christ-centered unity at the end of the program. I dismissed the class after a short prayer.

Week 19: Synopsis of the Christ-Centered Biblical Unity Toolbox Lessons

The last lesson allowed participants to ask questions about any Christ-centered unity tools discussed in the previous classes. In week 13, I asked participants to create a list of their own unity tools from Colossians 3:12–15. In week 15, most participants presented their findings and produced a list of six possible tools. I asked the students to save their work for further discussion on the Christ-centered unity tools for the last session.

¹¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 289.

After presenting arguments for and against a list of six tools, I concluded that there are eight tools, but two are reinforced tools, and one is the wrench serving to operate the other seven tools. I continued to explain that the two reinforced instruments play a double role, as discussed in weeks 16 and 17.

I further added that the fact that we did not study the support tools separately does not in any way diminish their role as a tool. The class unanimously agreed with me. Some participants recommended incorporating these tools in the ministry plan. They believed that would facilitate the integration of new members in the church's fellowship.

A pivotal suggestion came from a young student who requested that a project of this kind be presented every five years to revitalize the church. He continued to say such a project would help the church refocus its attention on a Christ-centered unity fellowship. I replied that the suggestion is impeccable, but with the ministry plan in action, such a need would deem unnecessary. When I asked the participants if the project was worth their time, they answered with an exclamative YES.

Before I distributed the BBUI post-project survey, I reminded participants that honest responses to the questions were crucial. I continued with directions on how to fill out the survey. I asked participants to take the survey home and return it the following Sunday. I led the class in prayer before dismissing the class.

Week 20: Feedback on the Project and Conclusion

On the last day of the project's implementation, I collected all post-survey forms from the participants to assess the project's versatility in the local church. One hundred percent of the participants returned the BBUI post-project survey. I thanked the participants for their faithfulness in the program and encouraged them to cultivate the biblical Christ-centered unity principles they learned. I concluded to say that Christ-centered unity in a local church must be a lifestyle of every church member, not a one-time project. I dismissed the class in prayer.

Conclusion

The project implementation was initially scheduled to end by December 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to postpone it for a full year. Finally, on April 25, 2021, I initiated the project implementation. During the execution of the project, unforeseen events in the church caused intermittent delays that dragged the process until the end of March 20, 2022. The core of the project focused on biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. It laid the ground for training believers to cultivate Christ-like character in their relationships in the local church. Furthermore, the Christ-centered unity tools helped trainees experiment with the tools God has bestowed them to live Christ-centered unity of the Spirit in the local church. At the end of the project, many participants testified to the change that the project brought into their spiritual lives.

After the re-administration of the BBUI survey, I found that the *t*-test result showed that the Christ-centered biblical unity training changed the volitional character of believers tremendously in the local church. The dependent samples I used for pre- and post-project surveys indicated a positive, statistically significant difference between the untrained (pre) and trained (post) believers. The training dramatically increased the participants' ability to cultivate a Christ-centered unity in the local church. During the project's implementation period, eighty church members participated in the biblical Christ-centered unity training, and all of them were included in the assessment. A *t*-test for dependent samples showed a significant positive change in members knowledge ($t_{(79)} = 156.38, p < 0.001$). Chapter 5 will provide a thorough analysis of the project's success.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale had a terrible experience after the passing of its long-time pastor who led the church for over thirty years. Less than a year after the death of the pastor, the church began to experience the effect of factional bodies that wanted to satisfy their own interests over that of the congregation. The conflicts of interest created a hostile environment for the young people, which caused most of them to leave the church. Also, passive members who were caught up in these conflicts' crossfire abandoned the church altogether.

To help the church refocus on the primary goal of its existence, I developed a project to train the local church to live in Christ-centered intergenerational unity. I conducted pre- and post-surveys of the project, from which a *t*-test showed a positive increase in knowledge for cultivating Christ-centered unity in the church. A thorough evaluation of the project's success will help readers better understand why this project should serve as a platform to train believers for biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. The interpretation of the data results shows how the purpose and goals set for the project were met. I will further provide a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the project. To conclude the chapter, I will reflect on the project's usefulness both theologically and personally.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train members of Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to cultivate intergenerational unity within their families and the congregation. The purpose was accomplished successfully through a biblical Christ-centered unity program that lasted twelve non-consecutive weeks.

BBCF members were trained through sermon series and lessons on biblical principles to cultivate the unity of the Spirit in the local church. During the training sessions I exposed members to some practical aspects of intergenerational unity. They were given case studies to practice their ability to operate within the boundaries of the fruit of the Spirit by casting the works of the flesh out of their relationship (Gal 5:16-25; Col 3:12-14).

In addition to the preaching, teaching, and practical activities, I supplied participants with valuable learning resources to refresh their minds about biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church (references and handouts). During the execution of the project, I asked participants to gauge the unity of the Spirit in their midst. I further stated that the participants would have a chance to present the results of their works to the class at the end of the project. The individual curves of each participant showed that the project's purpose was a tremendous success. Eighty members completed the project. They were equipped to cultivate intergenerational unity in the local church.

I evaluated the success of the project using three main criteria: (1) the usefulness of the project, (2) increase knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity (BCU), and (3) sustaining materials to help members cultivate Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church. I evaluated the criteria according to the goals set for the project in conjunction with the church's leadership. Table 1 shows that out of 80 dependent participants, 79 strongly agreed that the project was valuable, and 78 strongly agreed that their knowledge of Christ-centered unity increased. They strongly agreed that I provided sustainable materials to cultivate Christ-centered unity in the local church.

Table 1. Rubric for the success of the project

Criteria	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Usefulness	0	0	0	0	1	79
Increase Knowledge of BCU	0	0	0	0	2	78
Sustainable materials available	0	0	0	0	0	80

The following sections will depict the concatenating results, explaining how each goal was met. Considering the data gathered from the participants and the outpouring of joy, satisfaction, and acquired knowledge they demonstrated to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity, I hailed that the project's purpose was a success.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of biblical unity among BBCF members. I administered the BBUI survey to eighty members of different age groups in the congregation at the beginning of the project. Participants received electronic and hard copies of the survey form the first week of the project. I formulated several questions on how one must exhibit biblical Christ-centered unity through love, compassion, and forgiveness to evaluate believers' understanding of the tools they have at their disposal to cultivate such a unity of the Spirit.

At the end of the project, I re-administered the same survey to the participants to determine if their understanding of biblical Christ-centered unity significantly increased. This goal was considered successful if: (1) 95 percent of the participants took the pre-survey and the post-survey, and (2) a *t*-test indicated a positive, statistically significant difference in participants' understanding of the biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church.

During the first stage of the project's implementation phase (before the COVID-19 pandemic), 125 members enrolled to participate in the project. A significant schism in the church resulted in a split and left the project with eighty participants. The assessment included all participants that did not leave the church. The measure for this goal included a post-training survey. The goal was met when a *t*-test for dependent samples showed a positive, statically significant difference in the understanding among the participants between pre- and post-training survey scores: $t_{(79)} = 41.71, p < .0001$). Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the pre- and post-project surveys favorable distribution

knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity (BCU). The number of participants who strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA) are reported on the tables accordingly. The distribution revealed that most participants had a strong favorable opinion of the project.

Table 2. Pre-project survey results for biblical Christ-centered unity

Participants Knowledge of BCU	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. The Bible commands Christians to love one another.				22	28	30
2. Every Christian has sufficient spiritual resources to love a fellow believer in any situation.			15	35	20	10
3. I am confident in my ability to love and show compassion to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	40	10	15	5	10	
4. I am confident in my ability to provide spiritual support to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	30	20	10	20		
5. I depend upon the Holy Spirit in my love for others.			35	25	20	
6. I believe that prayer is one of God's primary means to change people's hearts.				52	17	11
7. I believe the Bible is absolutely sufficient and authoritative to address human problems.			25	15	30	20
8. I know how to ask questions that expose a person's heart, attitudes, and desires.	45	23	12			
9. I can clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.	26	14		15	13	12
10. I have a biblical-based methodology to follow to forgive others.	67	7		5	1	
11. Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a mature believer.			40	12	8	10
12. Secular psychological therapy can bring about lasting change.		20	25	14	16	5
13. If a friend is struggling with depression or discouragement, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian brother.			30	25	15	10

Table 2 continued

Participants Knowledge of BCU	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. If a friend is struggling with sinful lust, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian counselor.			10	30	25	15
15. Members of the same church must not disagree with one another on any subject.				50	15	15
16. Man is basically good.			30	27	13	10
17. The way we were raised determines how we react to trials.				65	7	8
18. Sin is the ultimate source of people's problems.			25	30	20	5
19. Suffering is never God's plan for his children.				76	4	
20. After becoming a Christian, God changes us so we no longer struggle with temptation.				34	16	30
21. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anger.		24	25	10	5	16
22. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anxiety.		24	25	10	5	16
23. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to have a good marriage.			30	25	15	10
24. I understand the biblical process for making peace between two believers in conflict.			45	15	10	10
25. I know how to apply the Bible's teaching on repentance and forgiveness.	15	22	3	30	10	
26. If someone has hurt me, I should wait until I am ready to forgive that person before talking to him.				60	6	14
27. The main goal of Christian biblical unity is to remain together in the same church.				5	25	50
28. I would like to learn how to help others grow in their faith.			25	35	20	
29. Bethany Baptist Church encourages its members to care like Christ: be spiritual friends and practice informal one-another ministry.	45	10		15	10	
30. Our community would be responsive if Bethany Baptist church understood and practices unity.				65	10	5

Table 3. Post-project survey results for biblical Christ-centered unity

Participants Knowledge of BCU	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. The Bible commands Christians to love one another.					5	75
2. Every Christian has sufficient spiritual resources to love a fellow believer in any situation.					4	76
3. I am confident in my ability to love and show compassion to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.				50	10	20
4. I am confident in my ability to provide spiritual support to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.					65	15
5. I depend upon the Holy Spirit in my love for others.					70	10
6. I believe that prayer is one of God's primary means to change people's hearts.					3	77
7. I believe the Bible is absolutely sufficient and authoritative to address human problems.					1	79
8. I know how to ask questions that expose a person's heart, attitudes, and desires.				42	18	20
9. I can clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.			5	25	30	20
10. I have a biblical-based methodology to follow to forgive others.					45	35
11. Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a mature believer.				25	30	25
12. Secular psychological therapy can bring about lasting change.	72	8				
13. If a friend is struggling with depression or discouragement, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian brother.						80
14. If a friend is struggling with sinful lust, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian counselor.						80
15. Members of the same church must not disagree with one another on any subject.	10	20	40	10		
16. Man is basically good.	60	15	5			
17. The way we were raised determines how we react to trials.				55	15	20
18. Sin is the ultimate source of people's problems.				60	10	10

Table 3 continued

Participants Knowledge of BCU	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. Suffering is never God's plan for his children.			35	25	10	10
20. After becoming a Christian, God changes us so we no longer struggle with temptation.		60	10	10		
21. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anger.					65	15
22. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anxiety.					65	15
23. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to have a good marriage.				40	15	25
24. I understand the biblical process for making peace between two believers in conflict.				55	5	20
25. I know how to apply the Bible's teaching on repentance and forgiveness.					70	10
26. If someone has hurt me, I should wait until I am ready to forgive that person before talking to him.	65	10	5			
27. The main goal of Christian biblical unity is to remain together in the same church.				60	5	15
28. I would like to learn how to help others grow in their faith.					70	10
29. Bethany Baptist Church encourages its members to care like Christ: be spiritual friends and practice informal one-another ministry.				20	30	30
30. Our community would be responsive if Bethany Baptist church understood and practices unity.					60	20

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a twelve-week sermon series and lessons on the biblical Christ-centered unity of the New Testament local church. To measure the success of this goal, I put in place a panel of five experts, three pastors and two lay persons, to review and evaluate the contents of the sermon series manuscripts and the lesson plan. The panel used two rubrics—one for the sermon series and one for the lessons—to evaluate the materials' biblical doctrine soundness, clarity, and relevancy to the church's needs. This goal was considered successfully met if a minimum of 95 percent of the rubric indicators

for both sermon series and lessons met or exceeded the sufficient level. The panel approved the sermon series manuscripts and the course materials. Tables 4 and 5 tabulated the results of the panel’s five members. For each question, the number of members of the board who answered the questions as “insufficient,” “requires attention,” “sufficient,” or “exemplary” are affixed under the appropriate indicator.

Table 4. Rubric for the evaluation of the sermon series by the panel

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon series is clearly relevant to unity.				(5)	
The material is faithful to the Bible’s teaching on unity.				(5)	
The material is theologically sound.				(5)	
The thesis of the sermon series is clearly stated.				(5)	
The points of the sermons clearly support the thesis.				(5)	
The sermon series contains points of practical application.				(5)	
The sermon series is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.				(5)	
Overall, the sermon series is clearly presented.				(5)	

Table 5. Rubric for the evaluation of the lesson plan by the panel

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The course is clearly relevant to unity.				(5)	
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on unity.				(5)	
The material is theologically sound.				(5)	
The thesis of the lessons is clearly stated.				(5)	
The points of the lessons clearly support the thesis.				(5)	
The lessons contain points of practical application.				(5)	
The lessons are sufficiently thorough in their coverage of the material.				(5)	
Overall, the lessons are clearly presented.				(5)	

At the beginning of the project, I met with a panel of five experts to review the curriculum of the biblical Christ-centered unity project. I submitted the materials to the panel members three weeks before the meeting. I also distributed the rubrics to them to evaluate the (1) the faithfulness of doctrine, (2) clarity of contents to be taught, and (3) relevancy of the sermon series and lessons to the actual needs of the church. I gave explicit instructions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a checkmark on the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: 1=insufficient, 2=require attention, 3=sufficient, and 4= exemplary. Please, check the appropriate answer. (3) Use the comments column to provide any additional comments or feedback regarding your answer.

After completing the rubrics for both the sermon series and lessons, the result showed that all five members of the panel found that the sermon series manuscripts and the curriculum for the lectures were exemplary, and they voted to recommend the implementation of the project to BBCF.

Goal 3

The third goal of this project was to increase the knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity among BBCF members. I taught a twelve-week sermon series and lessons on biblical Christ-centered unity of the New Testament local church to a group of eighty members to train them to practice and cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. I preached six sermons to teach believers how to develop a biblical mindset of unity in the local church. The sermons were preached to the whole congregation; however, only the results of dependent participants were considered for the post-project survey.

I did not preach twelve sermons as planned in the goals set for the project because of a conflicting schedule with the church's agenda. However, I addressed materials from all twelve sermon manuscripts. Therefore, the participants benefited from the whole sermon series as approved by the panel of experts. The sermons walked believers on steps they must take to arrive at a lasting biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. In the last sermon, I focused on the tools believers have at their disposal to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity.

In addition to the sermon series, I trained three Sunday school teachers to teach the first three lessons on biblical Christ-centered unity. The three teachers and I taught twelve lessons on various aspects of biblical Christ-centered unity. Eight of the twelve lessons were dedicated to the resources God puts at believers' disposal to cultivate a biblical Christ-centered harmony. I concentrated most of the teaching on the Christ-centered unity tools that I developed for the project, which are eight powerful tools believers must use to create a sincere and lasting unity in the local church. The teaching was not only theoretical but also practical. I implemented two case studies from lesson 8 to demonstrate how the fruit of humility is essential in believers' relationships.

At the end of the project's implementation, I re-administered the BBUI survey to the same participants. The post-project survey aimed to compare believers' understanding of biblical Christ-centered unity before and after the teaching. The result showed an exponential growth in knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity among those who

participated in the training. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test comparing the before and after BBUI surveys showed a positive, statistically significant difference in increased understanding and knowledge of biblical Christ-centered unity after the training.

The *t*-test result showed that the biblical Christ-centered unity training project for a group of eighty members at BBCF made a statistically significant difference resulting in increased understanding and knowledge of the biblical concept of unity ($t_{(79)} = 41.71$, $p < .0001$). Also, the result indicated that the mean score of the test after the twelve-week training sessions ($M=154.79$) increased considerably compared to the mean score ($m=105.26$) before the program. Furthermore, it showed that the *t*-Stat value (41.71) was greater than the *t*-Critical two-tail value (1.99). Therefore, the change in scores was not due to chance but that the intervention made a positive, statistically significant difference in believers' understanding of biblical Christ-centered unity.

Table 6. Pre- and post-project surveys statistic

	Pre-Project Survey	Post-Project Survey
Mean	105.2658228	154.7974684
Variance	359.6335605	77.65076274
Observations	79	79
Pearson Correlation	0.975116778	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	78	
t Stat	-41.71496884	
P(T<=t) one-tail	2.13298E-55	
t Critical one-tail	1.664624645	
P(T<=t) two-tail	4.26595E-55	
t Critical two-tail	1.990847069	

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to sustain the understanding and practices of a Christ-centered unity at BBCF. The ministry plan aimed to arm believers with the resources needed to cultivate a Christ-centered unity in the local church and to train new members to develop such characteristics in their relationships with others. I met

with the deacon board at the end of the project to evaluate the proposed ministry plan to sustain a biblical Christ-centered unity in the church. The goal was measured using a rubric to assess the (1) ministry plan functionality, (2) communication process, (3) training elements, (4) provision for discipleship resources, and (5) action plan. The goal was considered successful if 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level and the deacons endorsed the ministry plan.

I administered the ministry plan evaluation survey to the deacons and instructed them on how to answer multiple-choice questions. I asked them to follow these directions: Answer the following questions: (1) Place a checkmark on the multiple-choice questions. (2) Some questions ask you to give your opinion using the following scale: 1=insufficient, 2=require attention, 3=sufficient, and 4= exemplary. Please check the appropriate answer. (3) Use the comments column to provide any additional comments or feedback regarding your answer. Table 6 tabulated the results of the five members of the deacon Board. For each question, the number of members of the panel who answered the question as “insufficient,” “requires attention,” “sufficient,” or “exemplary” had affixed under the appropriate indicator.

Table 7. Ministry plan evaluation for a sustaining biblical Christ-centered unity

1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Content					
The plan is easy to understand.				(5)	
The plan is simple to implement.				(5)	
Scope					
The plan accounts for a broad scope of ministries.				(5)	
The plan considers each member's role in promoting Christ-centered biblical unity in the church.				(5)	
Resources					
The plan considers the church's resources.				(5)	
The plan considers the church's limitations.				(5)	
Application					
The plan involves the church's leaders in implementing and sustaining the ministry plan.				(5)	
The plan facilitates each participant's ability to practice Christ-centered biblical unity in a specific ministry context.				(5)	

Strengths of the Project

The postmortem revealed four strengths or benefits of implementing this project. First, this project exposed the underlying effects of the absence of biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. The theme of unity is not new in the church, but it only surfaced when disunity was gnawing at the church. When believers are aware of the danger of dissent in a local church, they strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in their midst.

The implementation of the project exposed believers to the tremendous assets at their disposal to practice biblical Christ-centered unity. It incited them to become proactive in their quest for lasting unity in the local church. Through the execution of this project, the church understood that biblical unity creates an environment for the church to experience God's power. When there is disunity in a church, the Holy Spirit is absent. Therefore, the glory of God cannot manifest in the church.

Second, the project helped the church recover from a significant split in 2019. The implementation of the project brought a renewed commitment from the members to cultivate Christ-centered unity in the church. The revitalization of the project engendered several new ministries in the church. After the split, many bystanders believed that the church's ministry would arrive at its term. However, it was the complete opposite. In less than two years, the church grew from eighty active members to almost two hundred members.

Third, the project identified the root cause of disunity that led the church to a schism. As a result, the church now has a structure in place to prevent a repeat of such disagreement. One preventive action is to perform a yearly biblical Christ-centered unity assessment to evaluate the state of union in the church. A six-point Likert scale will be administered to members to gauge the temperature of unity in the local church. This annual exercise will help the church tremendously in addressing issues that members are sometimes reluctant to express to church leadership. This simple assessment will help decrease gossip among the members, which often explodes into chaotic disunity and division.

The fourth and final strength of the project is the sustainable structure designed to maintain the cultivation of biblical Christ-centered unity. I built a ministry plan to serve as a guideline for members to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity. This ministry plan contains a solid curriculum anchored in sound doctrine. Members can also use this curriculum to train new members to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church.

BBCF longed for such a ministry plan for years because the annual membership turnover reached 15 percent. New members were sometimes shocked to discover the church's degree of disunity, especially during the monthly members' meeting. The ministry plan will help them assimilate into church culture, which is grounded in biblical Christ-centered unity.

Weaknesses of the Project

The fulfillment of the project is a reminder that a well-executed project is not always error free in its implementation. These errors are sometimes unforeseen. The first weakness I discovered in the project's implementation was the project's length. The project was initially scheduled to be completed by December 2020. But I had to postpone it because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the timeline I put in place at the beginning of the project was irrelevant.

Second, resource limitation was a *casse-tête*.¹ This puzzling situation created an enormous challenge for me at the beginning of the project. The church split, and two-thirds of the leadership left the church. I had to train new leaders to take on the challenge of leadership. Implementing the project in a church in disarray was a challenge, but I concluded that it came at the right time. Without this project, it would have been challenging for me to revitalize the church.

Finally, the schism that resulted in a division in the church reduced the number of participants. I initially planned to have a group of 125 participants, but the project was left with only eighty participants. It was still a sizeable sample that could make a lasting contribution to cultivating biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church.

What I Would Do Differently

When I consider the importance of such a project in the life of a local church, I believe that I would increase the length of the project to fifty-two weeks. I could have a twenty-six-week sermon series on biblical Christ-centered unity to reach more people in the congregation. Most people in the church do not attend Sunday school, so using the Sunday school time to train members is not certain because most unruly members do not attend Sunday school.

In addition to the length of the project, I would have more practical sessions where people could bring to life the lessons through case studies. I would not script all

¹ Larousse, *Dictionnaire de Français* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 2016), s.v. "casse-tête."

the acts to allow the characters to pour their hearts out naturally. It would have been an excellent treatment for the members to learn if they exhibited the fruit of the Spirit in their relationships.

Finally, I would have written songs for each of the Christ-centered tools to help people remember the tools they have to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. People learn better when one sings or illustrates what is taught to them. In the past, the church sang the Psalms. Singing develops second nature in people. It is why people act what they sing. They do not need musical instruments to dance because second nature works with what they store in their hearts. The Gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke, are full of parables of Jesus because he knew people are creatures of their environment. In his commentaries on the Psalms, John Wesley explains, “David was raised up for establishing the ordinance of singing Psalms in the church of God.”² Such a practice helps the people of God remember his commandments better.

Theological Reflections

The Scripture contains recommendations for the people of God to live a holy and blameless life before God. Such a life requires that believers maintain a good relationship with God the Father, and one another. Theologically speaking, these two relationships sum up the kingdom and its law. Jesus declares to his disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Further he states, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus sums up God’s commandments to his people and concludes, “On those two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (v. 40).

While preparing for this project I did a lot of research on the subject matter. Unanimously, theologians agree that love is the nucleus of living the life of the kingdom. Because we are the children of God, our way of living must be on par with the kingdom’s

² John Wesley, *Psalms Explanatory Notes & Commentary* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2015), 6.

rules. Wayne Grudem strikingly notes, “The fact that the church is like a family should increase our love and fellowship with one another.”³ Scriptures are full of God’s actions evoking his steadfast love for his people. Consequently, he requires the same from us. The Lord abounds in steadfast love for his children (Exod 34:6), and his steadfast love endures forever (1 Chron 16:34).

Drawing from the commandment of Jesus (Matt 22:37-40), the apostle Paul writes, “If I speak in the tongues of man and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). Speaking of the endowment of gifts by the Holy Spirit, Gregg Allison writes, “The overriding purpose for these gifts is to bring blessings to the church,” and “the Holy Spirit is the creator and sustainer of unity in the community of faith.”⁴ Through Galatians 5:22-35, Ephesians 4:2-3, and Colossians 3:12-14, one comes to a better understanding of the fruit of the Spirit. These elements are vital for believers to maintain unity. Neglecting one of them can be arduous for the community of faith to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

In chapters 2 and 3, I fully developed the theological aspect of the ingredients of the fruit of the Spirit. They are the way of living in the community of saints. The essence of unity is love, love is God, and God is the Ruler of the community of saints—God’s people. Allison reminds, “In a positional sense, unity is a reality for the church: the church is endowed with the gift of oneness,” and “in a purposive sense, the church’s aim is to attain the unity of faith.”⁵ Therefore, As recommended by Paul, the church must strive and be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 859.

⁴ Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 118.

⁵ Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 167.

Personal Reflections

As I embarked on this project three years ago, I had no idea the effort it takes to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the church. Some declare judgment against others for causing disunity in the local church while being part of the problem. In the same way that people get trained to behave in society, from the cribs to the office, the church must also train believers to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity in their relationships. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is not instantaneous. It requires training and commitment from believers. And its cultivation is fragile when believers' pursuit of unity shovels the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now, BBCF knows how fragile a unity not of the Spirit can be. You need only one bad apple to dislocate the shaft of this unity, which is why believers must train to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity. Ignorance is a cancer that can destroy the one-body spirit in the church. From the initial stage of Christian life, the church must teach believers how to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity in the church. This education must be part of the church's agenda. Believers must be trained and continuously retrained to refresh their hearts and minds with the gift of oneness that the Holy Spirit endowed.

Lastly, leaders are models that church members follow. Therefore, the church must equip its leaders to give proper direction to its members to pursue and maintain biblical Christ-centered unity in their midst. Most of the time, the church leadership is the root cause of disunity in the house of God. They fight for power in the church and become agents of the devil without realizing it. They shield the church's growth by putting self-interest ahead of the kingdom of God. This project made me believe that all is not lost. Training the people of God to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity can make a significant impact on the quest to maintain unity of the Spirit in the local church.

Conclusion

This ministry project bolsters my endeavor to promote the cultivation of biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. When I started this project, the church I

inherited could be best categorized by other believers as a “lost church” or “not true church.” But at the end of the project, people could no longer hold this stigma on BBCF. The challenge I encountered was not superficial but monstrous. Two cataclysmic events loomed over the church during the preparation of this project: (1) a split that evaporated more than half of the congregation and (2) a worldwide pandemic that quenched the church’s growth.

Even though the project’s duration was compromised, the goals I set for the project were successfully met above expectations. The project brought revitalization to the church I had never seen in my 56 years of age as a Christian born and raised in the church. Implementing this project in the church was a blessing, and the members utterly testified that. Alongside the intense training of the biblical views on a Christ-centered unity in the local church, I created a ministry plan for the church that will accompany them in their quest to cultivate biblical Christ-centered unity. This project was a blessing for BBCF and all Christian sister churches from this generation and the ones to come. I bless the name of Yahweh for giving me this opportunity to be a worker in the vine of the Lord.

APPENDIX 1
COMMITMENT FORM

As you consider whether you can commit to this training, we would ask you to evaluate yourself carefully, prayerfully, and honestly.

If you decide to be part of this excellent training opportunity on Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church, then the next steps in your process will be to:

1. Sign and date this Personal Commitment Form.
2. Return this form to jwhyacinthe@bethanybaptistchurchofflorida.com by _____ (due date).

My Commitment to Christ-Centered Biblical Unity Training

I have carefully read all the information. Having weighed the benefits and costs, I am willing to fulfill all my commitments. Therefore, I would ask you to consider me for selection as a trainee prayerfully.

(Signature) _____
(Date)

I also grant Bethany Baptist Church of Florida my approval to contact me by telephone and email.

(Signature) _____
(Date)

APPENDIX 2

BASICS OF CHRIST-CENTERED BIBLICAL UNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

Bethany Baptist Church is committed to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations and equipping its members for the work of ministry. One of the ways we fulfill this commitment is by becoming like Christ in every aspect of our lives. We want to be a church of doers of the Word. In light of this vision, our church is considering our capacity to understand and practice a Christ-centered biblical unity among its members. This survey for Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale members will help us assess the church's current understanding and practices of Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church.

John Wesley Hyacinthe is conducting this research to collect data for a ministry project. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completing this survey, you are providing informed consent to use your responses in this project.

Because the ministry is relational, we prefer that you include your name below rather than completing the survey anonymously. However, if you choose to be anonymous, please use your church ID number or phone number for future reference.

Date: _____

Name (or Church ID): _____

Gender _____ **Age** _____

BELIEVER BIBLICAL UNITY INVENTORY (BBUI)
PRE AND POST-SERMON SERIES AND COURSE
EVALUATION

The following instrument is the believer biblical unity inventory (BBUI). A thirty-question survey follows some broad questions with a six-point Likert scale. The instrument's purpose is to assess members' level of understanding and practices of Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church. The pre-sermon series and course evaluation were completed by all participants who commit themselves to attend the sermon series and complete the course on Christ-centered biblical unity.

Directions: Please mark the appropriate answer. Some questions may ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

- SD (1) = strongly disagree
- D (2) = disagree
- DS (3) = disagree somewhat
- AS (4) = agree somewhat
- A (5) = agree
- SA (6) = strongly agree

1. The Bible commands Christians to love one another.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
2. Every Christian has sufficient spiritual resources to love a fellow believer in any situation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
3. I am confident in my ability to love and show compassion to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
4. I am confident in my ability to provide spiritual support to a person who faces an issue of suffering or sin.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
5. I depend upon the Holy Spirit in my love for others.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
6. I believe that prayer is one of God's primary means to change people's hearts.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
7. I believe the Bible is absolutely sufficient and authoritative to address human problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I know how to ask questions that expose a person's heart, attitudes, and desires.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I can clearly articulate the gospel and lead someone to salvation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I have a biblical-based methodology to follow to forgive others.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. Many problems with which people struggle require the help of a mature believer.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. Secular psychological therapy can bring about lasting change.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

13. If a friend is struggling with depression or discouragement, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian brother.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. If a friend is struggling with sinful lust, I would recommend him to speak with a pastor or Christian counselor.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. Members of the same church must not disagree with one another on any subject.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. Man is basically good.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. The way we were raised determines how we react to trials.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. Sin is the ultimate source of people's problems.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. Suffering is never God's plan for his children.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. After becoming a Christian, God changes us so we no longer struggle with temptation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anger.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to deal with anxiety.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. The Bible gives clear guidance for how to have a good marriage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I understand the biblical process for making peace between two believers in conflict.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I know how to apply the Bible's teaching on repentance and forgiveness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26. If someone has hurt me, I should wait until I am ready to forgive that person before talking to him.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. The main goal of Christian biblical unity is to remain together in the same church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 28. I would like to learn how to help others grow in their faith. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 29. Bethany Baptist Church encourages its members to care like Christ: be spiritual friends and practice informal one-another ministry. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 30. Our community would be responsive if Bethany Baptist church understood and practices unity. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

APPENDIX 3

MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation rubric was sent to the deacons of BBCF for review and endorsement. This team evaluated the ministry plan for applying Christ-centered biblical unity in the local church and each participants' ministry context.

Name of evaluator: _____

Date: _____

Ministry Plan Evaluation					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Content					
The plan is easy to understand.					
The plan is simple to implement.					
Scope					
The plan accounts for a broad scope of ministries.					
The plan considers each member's role in promoting Christ-centered biblical unity in the church.					
Resources					
The plan considers the church's resources.					
The plan considers the church's limitations.					
Application					
The plan involves the church's leaders in the implementation and sustenance of the ministry plan.					
The plan facilitates each participants' ability to practice Christ-centered biblical unity in a specific ministry context.					

Please include any additional comments regarding the ministry application plan below:

APPENDIX 4

SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation rubric was sent to an expert panel of three pastors and two lay members (one man and one woman) for review and approval. This panel evaluated the sermon series for clarity, faithfulness to Scriptures, and that the material is theologically sound.

Name of evaluator: _____

Date: _____

Sermon series Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon series is clearly relevant to unity.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on unity.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the sermon series is clearly stated.					
The points of the sermons clearly support the thesis.					
The sermon series contains points of practical application.					
The sermon series is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the sermon series is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 5

LESSONS EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation rubric was sent to an expert panel of three pastors and two lay members (one man and one woman) for review and approval. This panel evaluated the lessons for clarity, faithfulness to Scriptures, and that the material is theologically sound.

Lessons Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The course is clearly relevant to unity.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching on unity.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lessons is clearly stated.					
The points of the lessons clearly support the thesis.					
The lessons contain points of practical application.					
The lessons are sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lessons are clearly presented.					

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING THE MEMBERS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL UNITY AT BETHANY BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022
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This project centered on the development of biblical Christ-centered unity at Bethany Baptist Church of Fort Lauderdale. The first chapter describes the purpose, goals, context, rationale, and definitions of the project.

Chapter 2 considers the theological and biblical foundations of biblical Christ-centered unity for an intergenerational unity at BBCF. This chapter zoomed in on the source of believers' calling (Eph 1:3-10), cultivation of a worthy walk in Christ (Eph 5:15-21, Gal 5:16-26), a walk in unity with the triune God (Eph 2:1-22), an earnest work to maintain unity in the body of Christ (Eph 4:1-6), and a demonstration of an imitable biblical spiritual life transformation (Eph 5:1-8).

Chapter 3 exposes the theoretical and practical aspects of biblical Christ-centered unity. This chapter demonstrates that a church with a healthy ecclesiology trains its members to foster biblical Christ-centered unity through the experience of God's power, strengthening believers' faith through mutual love and service, and the living experience of God's power in all facets of believers' lives.

Chapter 4 depicts the implementation process of the project. The execution of the project consisted of the teaching of five sermon series and twelve lessons that covered the practical aspect of a biblical Christ-centered unity in the local church. Participants experienced this practical aspect of the project through interactive lessons and two case studies.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the project through a succinct evaluation of the purpose and goals of the project. It also analyzes the project's strengths and weaknesses, followed by personal and theological reflections on the "bien-fondé" of the project for an intergenerational unity in the local church.

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