

# Keeping The Unity Of The Spirit

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**Text:** Eph. 4:1-16

## **Introduction:**

- I. The first century city of Ephesus was at the crossroads of the world. It was a multi-cultural city of approximately 250,000 people. Its religions were as diverse as its people with multiple temples in tribute to pagan deities.
  - A. Paul established the church in Ephesus while on his third missionary journey, spending three years there between 53-56 A.D. (Acts 19; 20:31).
  - B. A Jewish synagogue provided his first audience (Rom 1:16), but there were also many believers from among the Gentiles who turned from the idolatry and the practice of magical arts to Jesus.
- II. If you think it would have been easy for people converted from both Judaism, paganism, and mysticism — some who were free men, others who were slaves — some wealthy, some not — to come together in one unified local body, you probably would be mistaken.
- III. Yet, as you read through the book of Ephesians — written **60-63 A.D.**, approximately eight years after the church had been established (**53-56 A.D.**) — it seems that the church had attained unity.
- IV. Even so, it appears that this unity was no doubt threatened leading Paul to encourage them to, “(be) diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3)
  - A. “Diligent” comes from a word (*spoudazo*) that means.
    1. *Louw-Nida*: “to work hard, to do one’s best, to endeavor” (1:661)
    2. *BDAG*: “to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, be zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort” (939)
  - B. Passages where this word is found help us to see the intensity behind Paul’s words (2 Tim 4:29, 21; Jude 3)
  - C. So, the church at Ephesus was taught to *expend great effort* to “preserve” or “maintain” the level of unity to which they had achieved.
- V. Now, unlike the city of Ephesus and though it has changed somewhat in recent years, the town where I live (Cullman, AL) is pretty much a homogenous community.
  - A. The church where I preach (South Cullman) reflects the community in which we live and is, for the most part, a homogenous church (in that we are made up of people who are mostly like us culturally, racially, socio-economically, and in most every other way).
  - B. Still there are times when doctrinal issues, and people, and personality differences arise that threaten the unity which we enjoy, and this makes Paul’s instructions in this passage extremely important to us — and I know it is to all of you as well.
- VI. Look with me at how this pericope is constructed.
  - A. In **vv. 1-3**, Paul “implore(s) you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling... (and commands the Ephesians to) be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
    1. Sandwiched between these two imperatives are the traits of character that are necessary to accomplishing this task, i.e., humility, gentleness, patience, etc.
    2. These are the attitudes that are foundational and essential to any effort toward peace and unity.

- B. Then, in **vv. 4-6** there are the “seven ones” — one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.
1. These form the fundamental doctrinal pillars of the divine unity — they *cannot be compromised* if we are to be the people God wants us to be.
  2. These must be “chiseled in granite” in our hearts and they must be taught in our Bible classes and from the pulpit. They should be lived in our practice and be the center-point of our evangelistic teaching.
  3. To convert someone to any other “platform,” is to convert them to something other than Christ and Him crucified; and that will cause souls to be lost!
- C. In **vv. 7-13** we have God’s provisions to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
1. It is absolutely necessary, in order for us to understand this passage, to keep in mind the first century context of this book.
  2. In this context, men were given miraculous spiritual gifts and were appointed to essential tasks to establish the framework — particularly in each local church — to make unity in Christ possible.
  3. Such miraculous gifts are not available to men today (1 Cor 13:8-10).
- D. Finally, in **vv. 14-16**, the apostle gives us a picture of “the unity of the Spirit.”
1. You have heard someone say, “I love it when a plan comes together.”
    - a. The idea being that separate pieces come together as in a puzzle, and the picture is complete.
    - b. Or, as in this case, work is accomplished and men grow to spiritual maturity as God intended.
  2. When this happens, unity in the local church is attained, maintained, and this is a beautiful thing.

VII. I think we all know that, if we step back and look at the big picture, we typically haven’t done a very good job of getting along with one another.

- A. Sometimes division has been caused by doctrinal corruption, purveyors of false doctrine, and men who want to “draw away disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30 NKJV)
- B. More often than not, however, division has been caused by other things. Sometimes we want to whitewash *these* divisions by innocently calling them “personality conflicts” when, in reality, they are caused by sinful character flaws.
- C. [*Incidentally, I believe the separation of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41 has been “given way too much mileage” by those seeking to justify division and has sometimes been used as an excuse to overlook sinful flaws. But, be that as it may.*]
- D. Paul begins his treatise on unity here by describing the godly traits of character that are essential to congregational unity.

VIII. If we are to attain and maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” then we must begin in the right place. And that is with.

**Discussion:**

- I. **Essential attitudes foundational to the unity of the Spirit.** (Eph 4:1-3)
  - A. **Humility.**

1. Humility is a quality that has been *misread, misunderstood, misinterpreted* and just plain *missed* by a great many people.
2. Humility is not.
  - a. Low self-esteem or lack of confidence. Confidence is not to be equated with arrogance. (Acts 26:26)
  - b. Self-abasement. (Josh 14:11-12; Isa 6:8; 1 Cor 16:13)
3. Timidity. (2 Tim 1:7)
4. Weakness. (Num 12:3; cf. Exo 32:19-20; Matt 11:28-30; cf. John 2:13-22)
5. Humility is.
  - a. *BSL*: “the disposition of valuing or assessing oneself appropriately; especially in light of one’s sinfulness...” (*Bible Sense Lexicon*, Logos, n.p.)
  - b. *Thayer*: “a deep sense of one’s (moral) littleness; modesty, lowliness of mind... to behave in an unassuming manner devoid of all haughtiness.” (614)
  - c. Our English word “humble” is from the Latin *humus* meaning “ground, or low”
    - 1) *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*: “1. not proud or haughty: not arrogant or assertive 2. reflecting, expressing, or offered in a spirit of deference or submission....”
  - d. So, merely by these definitions it is obvious that humility is the antithesis, the absence, of pride. (Pro 29:23; Jas 4:6)
6. Humility is important because:
  - a. *It impacts the way we view God*. Pride distorts our vision of God, humility helps us see Him for who He is.
  - b. *It impacts the way we view ourselves*. Remembering who we were, and that we are saved by His mercy and grace, helps us maintain proper perspective.
  - c. *It impacts the way we view others*. We are to consider others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4). Our priorities should be, 1) God, 2) Others, 3) Ourselves.

## B. Gentleness.

1. “Gentleness” comes from the Gr. *prautes* and means, “acting in a manner that is gentle, mild, even tempered” (BSL).
  - a. *Louw-Nida*: “gentleness of attitude and behavior, in contrast with harshness in one’s dealings with others — ‘gentleness, meekness, mildness’” (1:748)
2. Others describe “gentleness” in this way.
  - a. *Bratcher & Nida*: “*Gentle* is closely allied to the previous virtue [humble - jhd] and is a consequence of it (see Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim 2:5). It may be translated as ‘treat others in a gentle way.’ But a negative expression may be more effective, such as ‘do not be hard on people’” (94) (cf. Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:25)
  - b. *William Hendriksen*: Gentleness “...is definitely not weakness or spinelessness, the characteristic of the person who is ready to bow before every breeze. It is submissiveness under provocation, the willingness rather to suffer injury than to inflict it.” (“*Colossians*,” BNTC, 6:157).
  - c. *Harold W. Hoehner*: “This is the opposite of self-assertion, rudeness, and harshness. It suggests having one’s emotions under control. But it does not

suggest weakness. It is the mean between one who is angry all the time and one who is never angry. One who is controlled by God is angry at the right time but never angry at the wrong time.” (2:633)

- d. *John R.W. Stott*: “On the contrary, it is the gentleness of the strong, whose strength is under control. It is the quality of a strong personality who is nevertheless master of himself and the servant of others. Meekness [*gentleness* - jhd] is ‘the absence of the disposition to assert personal rights, either in the presence of God or of men’.” (149)
3. The importance of possessing gentleness is seen in the fact that it is a trait of Jesus. (Matt 11:28-30)
    - a. If we do “learn from” Jesus, if we want to have a Christ-like spirit, then we’ll develop the trait of gentleness within us. (Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24; 1 Pet 1:15-16)
  4. There are three areas where gentleness is especially needed as we pursue “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
    - a. Gentleness of MOTIVE.
      - 1) Gentleness is an important trait to have, particularly in conflict — and it is a necessary response to anger. Paul has quite a bit to say about anger in this chapter (Eph. 4)
        - a) He speaks about righteous indignation. (Eph 4:26-27)
        - b) But he also talks about unrighteous anger (Most of the references to anger in the Bible are of the sinful variety. Although it is possible for us to be angry and not sin, sinful anger is much more common) (Eph 4:29-30)
      - 2) Anything that is not explicitly intended to edify a brother *should not be said!*
        - a) If our anger has any other motive than to build up our brother — particularly if it has a selfish motive — it has no place in our heart, our mind or in our mouth!
      - 3) Sometimes, we may need to be angry, but that anger needs to be.
        - a) **About the right things** — the things of God.
        - b) **Focused toward the right person/circumstance** — be careful lest your indignation be focused on the wrong source.
        - c) **Spoken at the right time** — there is a right time and place to express your anger, and there’s also a wrong time and place.
        - d) **For the right purpose** — our indignation should be for the purpose of correcting wrong committed; not for just “venting our spleen” or to verbally slap another.
        - e) **To the right degree** — We must always measure our response and control our anger; because an over-response does more harm than good. (Col. 4:6)
        - f) **For the right duration** — we need to get over our anger quickly.
      - 4) All of this requires that we carefully and thoughtfully examine our own motives before we engage one another. (Jas. 4:1-2)

- a) They were fighting and quarreling because of their own “lusts and... envy” — they weren’t getting what they wanted.
  - 5) So, to avoid unholy conflict (notice I said unholy conflict - not all conflict is unholy), we need to ask ourselves some questions about our motives:
    - a) Why am I really angry?
    - b) What do I want out of this? What is my goal?
    - c) Do I want to win my brother or win the fight?
    - d) Do I want to help my brother or help myself to the idol I am pursuing?
    - e) Is God’s will paramount or is my will paramount?
  - 6) When we figure out what we want, we’ll know what our motives are and whether they need to be changed or not.
- b. Gentleness of MANNER.
- 1) Once we have assessed our motives it is important to recognize that HOW we communicate is just as important as WHAT we communicate.
  - 2) Gentleness requires that we believe the best and not the worst. (1 Cor. 13:7)
  - 3) Gentleness requires that we decide to listen before we talk. (Pro 18:13, 17)
  - 4) Gentleness requires that we be careful in our manner of communication with one another, especially while in the middle of disagreement or conflict. (Pro 17:27; 15:1; 15:18; 25:15; Gal 6:1-2)
- c. Gentleness of MESSAGE.
- 1) There are some things that this cannot mean:
    - a) We can’t change God’s message. (Gal 1:6-9)
    - b) We can’t abbreviate the message. (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27)
    - c) There is never a time for bold, authoritative preaching and teaching. (Acts 4:29; 9:29; 19:8; Titus 2:15)
    - d) There is never a time for reproof and rebuke. (Titus 1:13; 2 Tim 4:1-5)
  - 2) This does mean:
    - a) We need to walk in wisdom toward non-Christians; those outside the body of Christ. (Col 4:5-6)
    - b) We need to treat babes in Christ as babes in Christ. (1 Thess 2:7-8, 10-12; 1 Cor 3:1-4)
    - c) We need to lay a good foundation before we try to build a building.
    - d) We always need to try gentleness first. (1 Cor 4:21)
    - e) We should do our best to be understood and not misunderstood.
    - f) We should allow time for understanding, acceptance, and application. (John 16:12-13; 1 Cor 11:34)
  - 3) We need to make it clear that our primary aim is to please God and help everyone else please God, too. (2 Cor 5:9,11; 2 Tim 2:24-26)
  - 4) If you are in conflict and you don’t know what to say, don’t say anything. (Pro 10:19; Psa 39:1; Jas 3:6-10)

C. Patience.

1. Our English word is related to the Latin *pati* which means “to suffer.”
  - a. *Meriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*: “1: bearing pains or trials calmly or without complaint 2: manifesting forbearance under provocation or strain 3: not hasty or impetuous 4: steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity....”
2. The Greek word (*makrothymia*) is used to refer to.
  - a. *BSL*: “...patient endurance of pain or unhappiness.”
  - b. *BDAG*: 1 the state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome, *patience, steadfastness, endurance*.... 2. ... the state of being able to bear up under provocation, *forbearance, patience* toward others....” (612)
  - c. *Thayer*: “2. patience, forbearance, long-suffering, slowness in avenging wrongs....” (387)
3. *William Barclay*, in his Daily Study Bible Series, illustrates patience this way.
  - a. “To take an imperfect analogy — it is often possible to see a puppy and a large dog together. The puppy yaps at the big dog, worries it, bites it, and all the time the big dog, which could put the puppy in its place with one snap of its teeth, bears the puppy’s impertinence with a forbearing dignity.” (160)
4. *David Pratte* comments.
  - a. “...we all have differences of background, culture, and personality as well as personal preferences that tend to cause conflict with other people. Learning to get along takes time, effort, and a willingness to endure things that we may strongly prefer would be otherwise.
  - b. ...imagine how difficult it was for people of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds to learn to get along in the early church. This is the primary application that Paul makes in the context. But the principle applies the same to us in our differences of background and culture as well. Only by such attitudes as patience and longsuffering can we learn to overcome our differences and work together in peace.” (74, emphasis mine - jhd)
5. The Scriptures tell us that patience is an attribute of.
  - a. God (1 Pet 3:20; Neh 9:16-21; 2 Pet 3:9)
  - b. Jesus Christ (Col 3:13; 1 Tim 1:12-16)
  - c. The Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22)
  - d. Righteous men (1 Sam 24:1-11; 26:1-25; Jas 5:10-11; Matt 5:10-12; Heb. 6:11-12)
6. The quality of patience is a necessary trait for any Christian
  - a. If we want God to be patient with us, we must be patient. (Matt 18:32-35; cf. Col 3:12-13)
  - b. Patience is necessary to maintaining the unity of the Spirit. (Eph 4:1-3)
  - c. Patience is necessary, especially for teachers and preachers in their work of teaching. (2 Tim 4:2; 2:10; 2:24-26)
  - d. Patience is needed in parenting. (Pro 22:6; Eph 6:4; Heb 12:11, NCV)
7. What patience can do for you.

- a. It allows time for growth. (1 Pet 2:1-2; 2 Pet 3:18)
  - b. It considers weakness. (Rom 15:1; Luke 22:31-32)
  - c. It will attract people to your ear. (Gal 6:2)
  - d. It will stop you from quick retaliation. (1 Pet 2:23)
8. How do we develop patience?
- a. Develop a greater love for people. (1 Cor 13:4)
  - b. Spend a lot of time in prayer. (Col 1:9-11)

**D. Tolerance.**

1. Good Bible Dictionaries help us a lot in understanding what the word *tolerance* (*anechomai*) meant in a first century setting.
  - a. *BSL*: “to endure something unpleasant or difficult whether on one’s own behalf or on behalf of someone else.”
  - b. *BDAG*: “to... endure, bear with, put up with.” (78)
  - c. *Louw-Nida*: “...to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty... to put up with someone or something, implying extensive patience—’to bear with, to put with, to be very patient with.’... to continue to bear up despite difficult and suffering— ‘to endure, to bear up, to demonstrate endurance, to put up with.” (1:307)
  - d. *Vine*: “signifies ‘to hold up against a thing and so to bear with’”
2. Comparing different English translations help us.
  - a. “Showing tolerance for one another” (NASB)
  - b. “Forbearing one another” (ASV; KJV; RSV; YLT)
  - c. “Bearing with one another” (ESV; NET; NAB; NIV; NKJV; NRSV)
  - d. “Putting up with one another” (LEB)
  - e. “Accepting one another/each other” (NCV; HCSB; ISV)
  - f. “Steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other” (The Message)
  - g. “Making allowance for each other’s faults” (TLB)
3. Comments from others help us.
  - a. *A. Skevington Wood*: “To bear with another (literally, ‘hold him up’) is to put up with his faults and idiosyncracies, knowing that we have our own.” (11:55)
  - b. *Frances Foulkes*: “It is the practical outworking of longsuffering [*patience - jhd*]. ‘It involves bearing with one another’s weaknesses, not ceasing to love one’s neighbors or friends because of those faults in them which perhaps offend or displease us’ (Abbott). It is ‘that mutual tolerance without which no group of human beings can live together in peace’ (Stott).” (10:116).
4. Biblical tolerance does not mean that we ignore or whitewash sin. (Psa 97:10; 119:104, 128; Amos 5:14-15; Rom 12:9-10)
5. But, it does mean:
  - a. We must bear with one another’s differences. (Gal 3:28-29; Eph 5:22-23; Eph 6:5-9; cf. 1 Cor 12)

- b. We must bear with one another's minor faults and idiosyncrasies. (Ecc1 7:21-22)
- c. We must bear with one another's differences in judgment. (Acts 15:36-41; 1 Cor 9:3-7; 2 Tim 4:11)
- d. We must bear with one another's teaching. (Mark 6:51-52; Matt 17:20-21)
- e. We must bear with one another in responding to sin when we see it in the lives of others. (Gal 6:1-2; Rev 2:20-21)
- f. We must bear with one another's conscience. (Rom 14; 1 Cor 8-10; Rom 14:14, 20)

#### E. Love.

1. The Greeks had four words, all of which we translate by our one English word *love*. The most often used of these words in the NT (*agape*) is the one found here.
2. *Agape* is used in the NT to describe God's feelings and actions toward.
  - a. His Son. (John 17:26)
  - b. The world of unregenerate men, generally. (John 3:16; Rom 5:8)
  - c. Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ particularly. (John 14:21)
3. Love (*agape*) is the word that is used to express the essential nature of God. Or, put another way, *love* is defined by the character of God – He is love's perfect illustration. (1 John 4:8; Eph 2:4-5; John 15:13)
4. Consider the qualities of God's love.
  - a. It is **intellectual**: It is not an uncontrolled reaction of the heart, but a concentrated exercise of the will.
    - 1) *William Barclay*: "*Agape* has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live. *Agape* has supremely to do with the *will*." (*New Testament Words*, 21)
  - b. It is **selfless**: It is a caring love, one which becomes involved with the need of others and thinks others more important than self.
  - c. It is **giving**: It provides the need that another has. It looks not to its own interests but to the interest of others.
  - d. It is **unearned**: It does not depend upon the one being loved having to earn such love; it is given freely and without condition.
  - e. It is **non-exclusive**: *it is not expressed only to a select few*, but an all-embracing benevolence, shown toward all.
5. Therefore, we need to know that *agape* love is not:
  - a. A romantic love that is governed by fickle feelings or volatile emotions.
  - b. A love of friends that springs from having things in common; a natural liking that exists between two because of common bonds.
6. To the contrary, *agape* love is a selfless, active good will toward and in behalf of other people. It motivates in our hearts a genuine concern for others and a readiness to think and do what is best for them, regardless of their attitude or conduct!
  - a. *It is an attitude which is determined from our convictions and is expressed from our will*. Love is a selfless decision to do what is in the best interest of others.

- b. It will affect the way we feel toward others, particularly the way we view them, but is not governed by our feelings. (Matt 5:33)
- 7. This love is important.
  - a. Paul said it was the greatest of three abiding virtues. (1 Cor 13:13)
  - b. It circumscribes (restricts, limits) our walk as a disciple of Jesus.
    - 1) Walking in love, putting the will of God and others before our own, means that there are some things we cannot do! (Eph 5:1-5)
  - c. By clothing ourselves in love, the other qualities of Christian character are bound together to produce a complete person, mature in Christ. (Col 3:12-14)
  - d. It is the safeguard principle that prevents us from turning our Christian liberties into destructive selfishness. (Rom 14:14-20; Gal 5:13)
  - e. It is sieve through which all our preaching/teaching of the truth must pass. (Eph 4:15)
- 8. It is the “universal motive” for all that we do. (1 Cor 16:14)
- 9. This kind of love is unifying!

## II. The Doctrinal Pillars — Divine Pillars — For The Unity Of The Spirit (Eph 4:4-6)

### A. One Body.

- 1. What is the ONE body?
  - a. The word body (Gr *soma*) — as you might imagine — is the typical word used for the human body, or even that of an animal.
  - b. In this passage it is used metaphorically — in the sense of “a unified group of people” (BDAG, 984)
  - c. Earlier in the book of Ephesians Paul had identified this body (Eph 1:22-23) as the church and the inference is clear, necessary and unmistakable:
    - 1) “There is one body” (Eph 4:4)
    - 2) The body is the church (Eph 1:22-23)
    - 3) Therefore, there is only ONE church.
  - d. We understand what *one* means with reference to *one* God, *one* Lord, and *one* Spirit. It means exactly the same thing when it is used to refer to *one* body, the church.
  - e. On several occasions, the Bible affirms the oneness of this body/church. (1 Cor 12:13; Matt 16:18)
- 2. It is important for us think of the church just as it is defined and described in the N.T.
  - a. The word church (*ekklesia*) means assembly, and always refers to just people.
  - b. It is used in the N.T. as a collective noun, such as flock or herd.
  - c. Simply put, the church of Christ are people who belong to Christ.
  - d. Not a denomination or collection of congregations. It was not a part of something else. It was, and is, a body of individual Christians related to Christ.
- 3. The church as Christ established it is an integral part of God’s eternal plan (it was in the first century and it remains so today). (Eph 3:10-11)

**B. One Spirit.**

1. It is impossible for us to overemphasize the apostle's declaration here — that there is ONE Spirit.
  - a. [...*except and unless we speak of the Spirit to the neglect and perversion of the other pillars — which many have done*]
  - b. The importance of the statement is underscored by the fact that Paul reminded the Ephesians, “for through Him (Jesus - jhd) we both have our ACCESS in ONE Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18)
    - 1) Jesus is our “access” to the Father.
    - 2) And that access comes, in some way, through the work of the “one Spirit.”
2. The Holy Spirit is a person.
  - a. This is important to know because there are several cults that teach that the Holy Spirit is merely an impersonal influence or force.
    - 1) *Christadelphians*: “There is only one God - the Father. The Holy Spirit is God's power.” (“What Christadelphians Believe,” [www.christadelphian.org.uk/wcb/](http://www.christadelphian.org.uk/wcb/))
    - 2) *Jehovah's Witnesses*: “The Scriptures themselves unite to show that God's holy spirit is not a person but is God's active force by which he accomplishes his purpose and executes his will.” (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, 1969, 1971, 1543, via *The Kingdom of the Cults*, n.p.)
  - b. But the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person, in the same way that God the Father and Jesus are persons, and in the same way that you and I are persons.
    - 1) The Bible uses personal pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit. (John 14:16-17; 16:7-8, 13)
  - c. Definition of “person”
    - 1) *New International Dictionary*: “A being characterized by conscious apprehension, rationality, and a moral sense.” (1827, via Franklin Puckett, “The Holy Spirit,” 5)
    - 2) *H. Leo Boles*: A person is “a being conscious of self, subsisting in individuality and identity, and endowed with intuitive reason, rational sensibility, and a free will.” (33)
    - 3) *The American Heritage Dictionary*: “1. A living human being, especially as distinguished from an animal or thing. 2. The composite of characteristics that make up an individual personality.....”
  - d. The Holy Spirit possesses these individual qualities of personality.
    - 1) He has a mind. (Rom 8:27)
    - 2) He thinks. (Acts 15:28)
    - 3) He wills. (1 Cor 12:11)
    - 4) He loves. (Rom 15:30)
    - 5) He possesses knowledge. (1 Cor 2:10-11)
    - 6) He can teach and remind. (Neh 9:20; John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:3)
    - 7) He can speak and hear. (John 16:13; Cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)
    - 8) He can testify. (John 15:26; Acts 20:22-23)

- 9) He commands. (Acts 13:2; 16:6-8)
  - 10) He intercedes. (Rom 8:26)
  - 11) He can be grieved. (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30)
  - 12) He can be insulted. (Heb 10:29)
  - 13) He can be resisted. (Acts 7:51)
  - 14) He can be lied to. (Acts 5:3)
  - 15) The Holy Spirit, then, is not a *thing*, not an *it*, nor holy *what* — the Holy Spirit is a *person* – an “*he*.”
3. The Holy Spirit is a *divine person*. [This is important to know because the Holy Spirit possesses the qualities and characteristics of deity.]
    - a. He is called “God”. (Acts 5:2-4)
    - b. He is eternal. (Heb 9:14)
    - c. He is omniscient. (Isa 40:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-11; John 16:13-15)
    - d. He is omnipresent. (Psa 139:7-10)
    - e. He was involved in creation. (Job 33:4; Psa 104:30)
    - f. He worked miracles. (Mat 12:28; 1 Cor 12:4-11)
  4. The work of the Holy Spirit in the first century church.
    - a. First, he had a work revealing God’s word (revelation). (John 16:12-13; 14:26; 1 Cor 2:10-13)
      - 1) Further, through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, miraculous spiritual gifts were given to provide revelation through Spirit inspired prophets. (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor 12:7-11)
    - b. Second, he had a work in confirming both God’s message and his messengers as being heaven sent (confirmation). (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20; Acts 10:38; John 3:2; Acts 2:22; Rom 15:19; Heb 2:3-4)
    - c. Third, as the Word was being preached and confirmed, the Spirit was also at work on those who listened with good and honest hearts (regeneration). (Ezek 36:25-27; Titus 3:5)
      - 1) The Great Debate in the religious world on this subject pertains to how the Spirit goes about regenerating and renewing the hearts of men.
      - 2) How the Spirit works in regeneration is illustrated on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Spirit does convict men of sin, BUT he does so when his message is preached.
    - d. Fourth, the work of the Spirit in sanctification. (1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Thess 4:3-4; 1 Pet 1:14-16)
      - 1) The question of how the Spirit does his work in our lives is answered by the apostle Paul. (2 Thess 2:13; Gal 5:22-25)
    - e. Fifth, the Spirit’s work in intercession. (Rom 8:26-27)
  5. The Holy Spirit and the Ephesians.

- a. The Holy “Spirit” is mentioned in every chapter of Ephesians, mentioned eleven (11) times in the entire book. Three key passages are important for us to think about. (Eph 1:13; 2:18; 4:4)
  - b. In order to best understand these verses — and every verse that mentions the Spirit in Ephesians — we need to interpret them in the light of the historical narrative of Luke (let Scripture interpret Scripture). (Acts 19:1-20)
    - 1) Paul came to Ephesus — found disciples who had been baptized of John’s baptism — who had not heard that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were being given.
    - 2) Paul baptized 12 men in the name of Jesus, laid his hands upon them, and they received the gifts of tongues and prophecy. (Acts 19:6)
      - a) Think about what Paul said about being “sealed with the Spirit” (Eph 1:13)
      - b) This also is the Spirit working in revelation and confirmation!
    - 3) Paul continued to preach in Ephesus for a total of three years (Acts 20:31), preaching in both the synagogue (to Jews) and the school of Tyrannus (to Gentiles) (Acts 19:8, 20).
      - a) Now, think about what Paul said, “through Him [Jesus Christ - jhd] we both [Jew & Gentile - jhd] have our access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18)
    - 4) Luke records that, “God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:11)
      - a) This is further evidence of the Spirit’s work in confirmation among the Ephesians.
  - c. Paul’s message — the message the Holy Spirit had given him — had its effect upon the hearts of the Ephesians. (Acts 19:17-20)
    - 1) Here is the work of the Spirit in both regeneration and sanctification.
    - 2) And this is the group to whom Paul is pleading. (Eph 4:1-4)
  - d. The “one Spirit” was alive and well among the Ephesians.
  - e. The “signs and wonders and gifts of the Spirit” were powerful in their effect of revelation and confirmation.
  - f. The gospel message which came from and thru the “one Spirit” was regenerating and sanctifying in its effect.
  - g. Further, upon this basis, the church at Ephesus could attain and maintain “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3)
6. So, how does this help us to build and maintain the “unity of the Spirit?” The answer: Because of the Spirit’s work, we are able to have:
- a. One mind — and it is the single mind of the Spirit because He has revealed it. (1 Cor 1:10)
  - b. One voice — and it is the message of the gospel with the Spirit as its divine Source; and it is our common message as we lift up our voices together in praise of God. (Rom 15:5-6)
  - c. One mission — the mission of Jesus Christ. (Luke 19:10)

**C. One Hope.**

1. *G. Campbell Morgan*, in talking about the importance of hope, once told the story of a man whose shop had been burned in the great Chicago fire. The next morning, he arrived at the ruins carrying a table. He set it up amidst the charred debris and above it placed this optimistic sign: “Everything lost except wife, children, and hope. Business will be resumed as usual tomorrow morning.” (*Pulpit Helps*, June 1987, 12:9:17)
  - a. We all need hope, and God’s word tells us repeatedly that the Christian has a living hope. (Heb 6:17-19; 1 Pet 1:3)
  - b. *Paul Earnhart*: “Paul said that ‘in hope we have been saved’ (Rom 8:24) and truer words were never spoken. It is the confidence we feel in God’s gracious promises and the assurance He gives us of our power to obtain them by faith that keeps us going and growing, serving God through good times and bad.” (3:4)
2. What is “hope”
  - a. “Hope” (Gr. *elpis*) is defined as “looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment, expectation.” (Harmon, 138)
    - 1) Hence, hope is desire plus expectation. It is wanting something, with confident expectation of achieving it.
    - 2) *Illustration*: Most people who play the lottery, if they have any sense at all, do not really hope to win. They certainly want to win and they wish to win, but they have no realistic expectation that they will win.
  - b. *Jack Cottrell*: “[I]n the Bible the Christian’s hope is not an uncertain wish or an unfounded longing, but a confident expectation of our future possession of all the elements of salvation not yet received....Its object is not simply what we *want* to happen, but what God has *promised* will happen (see 2 Tim 1:12).” (1:315)
  - c. *William Barclay*: “The Christian hope is not simply a trembling, hesitant hope that perhaps the promises of God may be true. It is confident expectation that they cannot be anything else than true.” (*New Testament Words*, 76)
3. This singular hope has eight elements to it.
  - a. The Christian has a hope of the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11–13; 1 John 3:2
  - b. The Christian has the hope of a bodily resurrection.
    - 1) The atheist has absolutely no hope beyond the grave
      - a) *Robert Ingersoll*: “Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud, and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry.”
      - b) *Bertrand Russell*: “The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none may tarry long.”
      - c) *Friedrich Nietzsche*: “Where is my home? For it do I ask and seek, and have sought, but have not found it. O eternal everywhere, O eternal nowhere, O eternal in vain.”
    - 2) But the faithful Christian has a living hope of the resurrection. (1 Thess 4:13-18)
  - c. The Christian has a hope of the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:18-25)

- 1) It will be a glorious body, unlike the lowly body that we have now. (Phil 3:20-21)
  - 2) A body no longer subject to:
    - a) The ravages of time
    - b) The intrusion of accident and injury
    - c) The affliction of sickness and disease
    - d) The ultimate insult of death
  - 3) It will be a body like Jesus' glorified body. (1 John 3:2)
  - 4) This mortal body will be transformed into a spiritual body. (1 Cor 15:42-49)
- d. The Christian has the hope of beholding the glory of God. (Rom 5:1-2)
- 1) *Jack Cottrell*: "The glory of God' (see 3:23) in this verse is surely a reference to the final, eschatological revelation of God's majesty and splendor....Our hope is not only that we will one day *behold* his glory...but that in a limited sense we will actually *participate* in it...or *partake* of it....The latter will be true in the sense that we will have a glorified body like the glorified human body of Christ (8:29-30; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2), and in the sense that we will actually dwell in the beneficent radiance of God's glorious presence (Rev 21:3-4, 23; 22:4-5)." (1:314-315)
  - 2) Paul says that "we EXULT in hope of the glory of God."
    - a) To "EXULT" is a strong emotional reaction, meaning "to take pride in something, boast, pride oneself, brag" (BDAG, 536)
    - b) *BSL*: "to display or proclaim publicly (and ostentatiously) a satisfied contentment with one's own or another's achievements."
- e. The Christian has the hope of intimate fellowship with God. (1 Thess 2:19)
- f. The Christian has the hope of final salvation. (1 Thess 5:8)
- 1) N.T. writers speak of salvation in at least three ways:
    - a) A salvation from all past sins when one becomes a Christian (Mk 16:16; Eph 2:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5)
    - b) A present salvation which all faithful Christians enjoy (1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor 2:15)
    - c) A future salvation (Rom 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Tim 4:16; Heb 10:36-39; 1 Pet 1:5, 9)
  - 2) It is this future salvation that is the helmet in the Christian's armor. This final salvation will mean:
    - a) No more temptation
    - b) No more sin
    - c) No more backsliding
    - d) No more the possibility of apostasy
    - e) No more struggle against sin
- g. The Christian has the hope of eternal life. (Titus 1:1-2; 3:4-7)

- 1) Eternal life is so much more than just living forever. The wicked will have an eternal existence (Matt 25:46), but they will not have eternal life
- 2) Eternal life is quantity and quality. It is the life that is life indeed. (Rom 2:6-7, 10)
- h. The Christian has the hope of an incorruptible inheritance. (1 Pet 1:3-4)
  - 1) There is no inheritance like this in this life
  - 2) All the things that we might inherit in this life, sooner or later, become corrupt and defiled, and they fade away
4. The living hope that we have should have an effect in our lives.
  - a. It should cause us to rejoice. (Rom 12:10, 11, 12)
  - b. It should cause us to be patient. (1 Thess 1:2-3)
  - c. It should cause us to purify ourselves. (1 John 3:3)
  - d. It should stabilize us. (Heb 6:17-19)
5. *Bill Hall*: “Entrance into heaven will not be based upon a long list of credentials built up accumulatively through the years (i.e., so many new converts, so many passages memorized, so many lives influenced, so many years in the service of the Lord, so many sermons preached, etc.), the person’s chances of going to heaven being enhanced with each new credential. Entrance into heaven will be based on the merit of Christ’s blood. One prepares for heaven by entering into Christ through faith, repentance, and baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3); living a faithful life in Christ; and dying in Christ. ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord’ (Rev. 14:13). This is the true basis for one’s hope, whether he has been a faithful Christian for fifty years or is just rising from baptism in newness of life.” (25:1:3)

#### D. One Lord.

1. We don’t use the term “Lord” very much in our Western society today.
  - a. The British still use the term often, although in practicality it is more an empty title than functionary description.
  - b. In the N.T., one who is a “Lord” (*kyrios*) is:
    - 1) *BDAG*: “1. One who is in charge by virtue of possession, *owner*.... 2. One who is a position of authority, *lord, master*” (577)
    - 2) *Thayer*: “*he to whom a person or things belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord; used a. univ. of the possessor and disposer of a thing, the owner... the master... possessed of the power to determine what is suitable....*” (365)
  - c. A “lord,” then, is a ruler; he is one who is sovereign and has authority over his domain.
  - d. Caesars, in ancient Rome were given the title of “lord.” Some claimed deity and demanded to be worshiped as “Lord” — their position and authority, at least in their own eyes, was to be unquestioned and unchallenged.
2. Jesus, however, is more than “a lord.” He is “*the* Lord of lords.” (1 Tim 6:13-16)
3. To acknowledge Jesus as Lord means that we acknowledge:
  - a. His Authority — we acknowledge Jesus’ authority by respecting his law. (Luke 6:46)

- 1) Jesus is the King (1 Tim. 6:15). How do we respect the authority of a king?
  - 2) He has all authority (Matt. 28:18). What does it mean to acknowledge authority?
  - 3) We must bow to His rule (Phil. 2:10)
  - 4) If we don't believe in the authority of Jesus, then we don't believe in the Lordship of Jesus.
  - 5) Unity in the Lordship of Jesus begins with acknowledging Jesus' authority.
- b. His Leadership — we follow in his steps. (1 Pet 2:21; John 13:15)
- 1) Jesus isn't merely an authoritarian, He is the Good Shepherd, and our pattern for living. (Psa 23:3; John 10:11)
  - 2) My point is: Jesus doesn't ask us to go where He, Himself, has never gone.
  - 3) If we don't believe in the leadership of Jesus, then we don't believe in the Lordship of Jesus.
  - 4) Unity among us is dependent upon our faith in the Lordship of Jesus and our willingness to follow His leadership.
- c. His Sovereignty
- 1) A Sovereign person is (*dynastes*)
    - a) *BSL*: “a powerful ruler — a person who rules or commands; especially understood as having great controlling influence.”
    - b) *Louw-Nida*: “one who is in a position of authority to command others — official, ruler. Acts 8:27” (1:478)
    - c) This word is used in Mary's song of praise when she visited Elizabeth. (Luke 1:46-47, 52)
  - 2) So, when we talk about Jesus as the “only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15), what are we talking about? Answer:
    - a) There is no one else who may change, alter, or amend Jesus' will.
    - b) There is no one, there is nothing, to whom or to which we can compare Him
    - c) No work of man can challenge Jesus sovereignty.
- d. So, when we acknowledge the sovereignty of Jesus, we will respect the singular nature of that authority. (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 1 Cor 3:11; 1 Tim 6:15; John 8:24)
- e. If we don't believe in the sovereignty of Jesus, then we don't believe in His Lordship.
- f. With regard to preserving the unity of the Spirit, unity among us cannot exist without acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus, and His Sovereignty.

#### E. One Faith.

1. When we engage a stranger in conversation it is not an uncommon thing for him/her to ask us, “*What faith are you?*” Depending upon the context, this person may be asking.
  - a. Are you a Christian? Perhaps a Muslim? Buddhist? Hindu? Or, nothing at all.

- b. But, in most conversations people are wanting to know our denominational affiliation? Are you a Baptist? Methodist? Catholic? Pentecostal? etc.
- c. In the eyes of the world, what “faith” we are is a matter of choice.
  - 1) Nowhere in the Bible is faith ever spoken of in the plural form.
- d. The denominational world may have many “faiths,” but in the eyes of God there is only “one faith” (Eph. 4:6).
2. It is within this “one faith” that we can find the unity to which God wants us to attain. (Eph 4:11-13)
3. This is the unity that Jesus prayed for us to experience. (John 17:20-21)
4. Throughout the N.T., inspired writers consistently emphasizes this singular system of faith (or responsive believe), and warns against any other. (Gal 1:6-8; Rev 22:18-19; Pro 30:6)
5. The devil knows something that so many people today spurn to learn: If he can get men to never accept the “one faith,” or, once having accepted it, to turn away from it, they cannot be saved. (Acts 13:6-11)
6. So, to summarize, what is this “one faith” we’re talking about?
  - a. The “one faith” is the teachings and doctrines of Jesus.
  - b. It encompasses everything that we need in order to be faithful to God — everything we need to be united with one another in our service to Him.
  - c. This “one faith” contains:
    - 1) Teaching about the life, character, and sacrifice of Jesus. (Gal 2:20; 1 Pet 2:21)
    - 2) Teaching in regard to God’s plan of salvation (H. B. R. C. B.)
    - 3) Teaching in regard to personal conduct. (2 Pet. 3:3-11; Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:1-15)
    - 4) Teaching in regards to God’s pattern for the church.
      - a) The organization of the church [local org. – elders, deacons, evangelists, etc.]
      - b) The worship of the church [L.S., praying, singing, teaching, giving]
      - c) The work of the church [Edification, Evangelism, Benevolence]
7. How can we have unity in the “one faith?”
  - a. By being steadfast within it.
    - 1) Standing in it. (1 Cor 16:13)
    - 2) Continuing in it. (Acts 14:21-22; Col 1:23)
    - 3) Holding to it. (1 Tim 3:8-9; Jas 2:1)
    - 4) Keeping it. (2 Tim 4:7)
  - b. By not falling away from it.
    - 1) Some fall through false teaching. (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 1 Tim 6:20-21)
    - 2) Some fall through failure to practice it. (1 Tim 5:8; 1:18-20)
    - 3) Some are self deceived. (1 Tim 6:6-10; 2 Tim 3:5-9)

- c. By being encouraged by it.
  - 1) It centers on Christ. (Gal 2:20)
  - 2) It nourishes. (1 Tim 4:6)
  - 3) It strengthens. (Acts 16:5)
  - 4) It rebukes. (Titus 1:13)
  - 5) It encourages us when we see others practice it. (Phil 1:21-25)
  - 6) It encourages us when we see WHO is preaching/practicing it. (Gal 1:22-24)
- d. By contending for it. (Phil 1:16, 27; 1 Tim 6:12; Jude 3)

**F. One Baptism.**

1. Even the casual Bible student should be able to see the importance of this “one baptism” in Jesus’ own words of the Great Commission. (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16)
2. The disciples took this Great Commission seriously and, in harmony with the Lord’s plan (Acts 1:8), they traveled through the world teaching and baptizing ALL who accepted the gospel, regardless of background. Again, please notice the emphasis on this “one baptism” in each of these cases of conversion.
  - a. Jerusalem. (Acts 2:38, 41)
  - b. Samaria. (Acts 8:12)
  - c. Simon the Sorcerer. (Acts 8:13)
  - d. Ethiopian Eunuch. (Acts 8:36, 38)
  - e. Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:18; 22:10, 16)
  - f. Cornelius, a Gentile, at Caesarea. (Acts 10:34-35; 10:47-48)
  - g. Lydia. (Acts 16:14-15)
  - h. Philippian jailor. (Acts 16:32-33)
  - i. The Corinthians. (Acts 18:8)
  - j. The Ephesians. (Acts 19:5)
3. What is the *proper element* of this “one baptism”?
  - a. I ask this question because it could be in any number of elements:
    - 1) Water (Mt. 3:11)
    - 2) The Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11)
    - 3) Fire (Mt. 3:11)
    - 4) Suffering (Mk. 10:35-40)
  - b. But, this Great Commission baptism — the one baptism of Eph 4 — is water baptism.
    - 1) The Ethiopian nobleman/eunuch was baptized in water. (Acts 8:36-38)
    - 2) Cornelius was commanded to be baptized in water. (Acts 10:47-48)
    - 3) Baptism “in the name of the Lord” is water baptism. (Acts 2:38; 10:47-48)
    - 4) Noah’s salvation is a type of our salvation. (1 Pet 3:20-21, NASB)

4. Who is to do the baptizing, who is *the administrator* of this “one baptism”?
  - a. We know that Holy Spirit baptism is not the one baptism of Ephesians 4, because of who administered it.
    - 1) Holy Spirit baptism was administered by Jesus. (Matt 3:11)
    - 2) The baptism of the Great Commission — the one baptism of Eph 4 — is to be administered by men. (Matt 28:19)
    - 3) Therefore, the baptism of the Great Commission — the one baptism of Eph 4 — cannot be H.S. baptism because they had different administrators.
  - b. Men teach and men are to baptize. (Acts 8:38; 1 Cor 1:14-16)
5. What is the *proper action* or *mode* of this “one baptism”?
  - a. Baptize comes from Gk. *baptiz*”... “to dip repeatedly, emerge, submerge” (*Thayer*, 94); “dip, immerse” (*BDAG*, 164)
  - b. The New Testament supports this definition.
    - 1) John’s baptism was immersion. (John 3:23; Matt 3:16)
    - 2) Philip and the Ethiopian. (Acts 8:38-39)
    - 3) Burial. (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12)
6. Who is *the subject* of this “one baptism”?
  - a. First, one must be a sinner (not a baby, not the mentally challenged)
  - b. Second, one must be taught. (Matt 18:19; Heb 8:8-12)
  - c. Third, one must be a believer. (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 8:36-37; 18:8)
  - d. Fourth, one must repent. (Acts 2:38)
  - e. Fifth, one must confess Christ. (Rom 10:10; Acts 8:36-37)
  - f. [*When one has met these conditions, then and only then, is he a proper candidate for this “one baptism!”*]
7. What is *the purpose* of this “one baptism”?
  - a. “For the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 2:38; Matt 26:28)
  - b. “To wash away sins” (Acts 22:16; Rev 1:5, KJV; Rom 6:3-4)
  - c. “To put on Christ” (Gal 3:26-27)
  - d. To gain entrance into Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:13)
  - e. To be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet 3:21)

**G. One God, and Father of all.**

1. One God.
  - a. The Bible repeatedly asserts, especially in the O.T., that there is “one God” and only “one God.” And the Bible is very clear in this teaching. (Deut 6:4; Isa 44:6; 45:5; 1 Cor 8:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19)
  - b. But people get a little confused when we start talking about the “Godhead” (“Trinity”).

- c. The Bible teaches that God eternally exists as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God, but there is ONE God (meaning there is only one Godhood, or Godhead, or state of being Deity).
- 1) A plurality of persons in the Godhead is first alluded to in the book of Genesis. (Gen 1:1, 26)
  - 2) “God” is from the Heb. *Elohim* (used 2500+ x in the O.T.) and it is a plural word.
  - 3) Notice the plural pronouns “us” and “our” in Gen 1:26 — Why?
    - a) The Father had a hand in creating the world. (Acts 17:24, 28-31)
    - b) The Holy Spirit had a part in creation. (Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; Psa 104:30)
    - c) The Son, Jesus, also had a part in creation. (John 1:1-3,14; Col 1:16; Heb 1:1-2)
  - 4) Interestingly enough, the word “one” when used of God in the O.T. (e.g., Deut 6:4) is always the Heb. *ehad*, which is a compound unity, one made up of others (“one” day — Gen 1:5).
    - a) This points to the makeup of the Godhead itself. There is a plurality of persons in the Godhead.
    - b) There is another Hebrew word for the singular “one” (*yahed*) and it is often translated “only” as in “one, and only one” (e.g., “take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac...” Gen 22:2).
    - c) For future study notice that, in the contexts where “one God” is emphasized, it is one Jehovah, or LORD in contrast to idols (Deut 4:32-35; Isa 44:6-12).
    - d) That there is “one God” doesn’t argue against there being more than one person in the Godhead.
- d. Who would have a problem with this concept of one God?
- 1) God’s own people, Israel, had a problem with the concept of one God.
    - a) While in bondage in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham, were confronted by many idols (“Ra” the sun-god; “Ptah” the creator god; “Isis” the magic god; “Anubis” the jackel god, and many others).
    - b) When the descendants of Jacob came out of Egypt, in addressing the final plague — the death of all the firstborn in the land of Egypt — God made a promise. (Exo 12:12)
    - c) In the month and years to follow, Jehovah revealed Himself to them as the one God of creation, and LORD of all (Gen. 1). He demanded singular worship. (Exo 20:2-5)
    - d) But they did not listen!
      1. (Exodus) At the foot of the Mountain, Aaron made an image. (Exo 32:1-8)
      2. (Numbers) After the incident with Balaam, “Israel joined themselves to Baal”. (Num 25:1-3)
      3. (Judges) After the death of Joshua, another generation arose who did not know the Lord and served Baal”. (Judg 2:10-12)

4. (United Kingdom — Solomon) “When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods. (1 Kgs 11:4-5)
  - e) (Divided Kingdom, Israel — Ahab) “... erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. (1 Kgs 16:32-33)
  - f) (Divided Kingdom, Judah — Manasseh) “... erected altars for the Baals and made Asherim, and worshiped all the host of heaven...” (2 Chron 33:3, 6)
- 2) The Greco-Roman society of the N.T. world had a problem with the concept of one God.
- a) They worshiped Zeus (Acts 14:11-13). Zeus was the supreme god of the ancient Greeks and Romans. He was the ruler of heaven and father of the other gods. He was identified by the Romans as Jupiter. (NNIBD, n.p.)
  - b) They worshiped Hermes (Acts 14:11-13). Hermes “was the Greek god of commerce, science, invention, and cunning. He served as messenger and herald for the other gods. Hermes was identified by the Romans with Mercury (NNIBD, n.p.)
  - c) They worshiped Artemis (Acts 19:24-28). Artemis was the virgin goddess of the moon, hunting, wild animals, and virginity. She was identified by the Romans as Diana. (NNIBD, n.p.)
  - d) In Athens, the Greeks worshiped so many gods they feared that they had forgotten one, so they erected an altar “to an unknown god” (Acts 17:23)
  - e) Point: Christianity was born into a polytheistic society. To Greek/Roman people, the concept of “one God” was a foreign concept. The unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-21), of which Paul wrote about (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3), and which has its own special appeal was/is impossible within pluralism and polytheism!
- 3) Many modern religions of the world have a problem with the concept of one God.
- a) Hinduism has many gods (“Brahma” the creator; “Vishnu” the preserver; “Shiva” the destroyer; and many others)
  - b) Buddhism is actually the worship of the greatest man who ever lived (in their belief). He is worshiped through the image of the Buddha.
  - c) Catholicism worships Mary through her “icon” (image), and Christ through an “icon.” This is often called iconolatry.
  - d) The Islamic god, Allah, is not the God of the Bible. It is not merely another name, an Arabic name, for the God of the Bible.
    1. Some believe that the name Allah originated from the worship of a moon-god in pre-Islamic Arabic mythology.
    2. The use of a lunar calendar and the crescent moon imagery seems to point to this.
    3. To be fair, Muslims today consider this an insult and find it repulsive. [Please understand, however, that finding truth repulsive is not unusual among Muslims. Our teaching that God has a “son” is insulting to Muslims]

- 4) Many Christians today have a problem with the concept of “one God”.
  - a) Idolatry: Literally, image worship, the worship of idols. Metaphorically, extreme admiration, love, or reverence for something or someone; placing things before God. (Col 3:5)
  - b) In an article published by *Christianity Today* (April, 2016) entitled, “Putting God first: 5 modern-day idols we’re in danger of taking over our lives” (They actually listed seven).
    1. Work
    2. Success
    3. Phones
    4. Image
    5. Materialism
    6. Sex
    7. Money
- 5) My Point (again): The unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-21), of which Paul wrote about (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3), and which has its own special appeal was/is impossible within pluralism and polytheism of our day!
- 6) Unity can only be attained when we recognize and acknowledge that “There is... ONE God!” (Eph 4:4, 6)

2. Father.

- a. There are three persons in the Godhead, and each has a different role. [It has accurately been said, especially concerning the scheme of redemption revealed in the Bible, that.]
  - 1) The Father wrought it
  - 2) The Son bought it
  - 3) The H.S. taught it
  - 4) The devil fought it
  - 5) The people sought it
  - 6) God, the Father, wrought it — He’s the originator of the plan. (John 3:16; Isa 53:10-11)
  - 7) Jesus bought it — He paid the price for sin. (Heb 2:9; Rev 5:9)
  - 8) H.S. taught it — He revealed it. (John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:10, 12)
- b. When you hear the word “father”, what do you think about?
  - 1) No doubt you think about your earthly father — your family — and family is very important to us. As father, mothers, and children, we enjoy a special relationship not enjoyed by others.
  - 2) When we become children of God, this same thing is true. We enjoy a special relationship with special blessings not afforded others. For instance.
    - a) Prayer (Matt 7:11)
    - b) Forgiveness (Eph 1:7)

- c) Inheritance (1 Pet 1:3-4)
- 3) Think about the blessings we have, that we receive, from our “Abba! Father.” (Gal 4:6)
  - a) He is a Father who loves. (1 John 3:1)
  - b) He is a Father who knows your needs. (Matt 6:8)
  - c) He is a Father who provides for you. (Matt 6:26)
  - d) He is a Father who protects you. (Heb 13:5-6)
  - e) He is a Father who is accessible; always there for you. (1 Pet 3:12)
  - f) He is a Father who forgives. (Matt 6:14)
- c. This “one God” of Eph 4:6 is — or can be — your “Father” and that is a special relationship that we share with one another — we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
  - 1) As a family, we are as interdependent upon one another as the members of our own physical bodies.
  - 2) Each family member provides something to the whole that is not and cannot be provided by any other member. (1 Cor 12:14-26; Eph 4:11-16).
  - 3) In this family we should find the attitudes that unite us (humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love).
- d. And all of this is made possible — our unity is made possible — because the one God is our “Abba, Father.”
- 3. Father of ALL.
  - a. Consider, first, what this meant in the first century.
    - 1) The most controversial issue in the first century was the Jew/Gentile issue: Must Gentiles who believe be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses? Paul argued that.
      - a) Salvation comes by grace through faith. (Eph 2:4-10)
      - b) The barrier between Jew and Gentile, the Law, was abolished, having been nailed to the cross. (Eph 2:14-15; Col 2:14)
      - c) All men are reconciled to God in one body, and both have the same access to God. (Eph 2:16)
      - d) This was the mystery that had been hidden in ages past, but now revealed to the apostles and prophets. (Eph 3:3-6)
      - e) All of this was in accordance with the eternal purpose of God. (Eph 2:10-11)
      - f) Now, all are united in one body, and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. (Eph 4:4-6)
    - 2) To this, other passages are in complete harmony. (Rom 10:12; Col 3:9-11; Gal 3:28-29; 1 Cor 12:13; Mark 16:15)
- 4. An important and timely application:
  - a. When my kids were little, I taught them to sing the little song, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.”

- b. But, today, we live in a world that is racially divided. I believe we are more racially divided today than when I was in high school and desegregation was the hot-button issue of the day.
- c. What should be the Christian's reaction to all of this? "There is... one God and Father of ALL." (Eph 4:6)
  - 1) When people have a problem with racism, what should we say to them?
    - a) The mystery of the gospel is about race. (Eph 3:3-6)
    - b) All people descend from the same parents. (Acts 17:26)
    - c) The Bible teaches that God doesn't look at the color of your skin. (1 Sam 16:7)
    - d) The Bible teaches all races will be in heaven. (Rev 7:9-10)
- d. Racism can cause a man to lose his soul.
  - 1) If I hate another person because of the color of his skin, I am hating a soul created in the image of God!
  - 2) In Matt 16:26, Jesus asks, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?"
  - 3) This passage affirms that one's soul is worth more than all the world.
  - 4) Now, let me ask, what color is that soul? Is it a black soul? A brown soul? Or, a white soul?
- e. The Bible says there is "One God and Father of ALL." (Eph 4:6)

### III. God's Provisions For The Unity Of The Spirit (Eph 4:7-13)

- A. The word "gift" (vs. 7), as in "Christ's gift" is the Greek word *dorea*. This gift, identified as "gifts" (vs. 8 — Gr. *doma*), was/were given after the ascension of Christ.
- B. **Vs. 8** is a quotation of Psalm 68:18, but this presents a slight problem:
  - 1. In the psalm the gifts are "received" among men; in our text Christ "gave" them."
  - 2. This is only an apparent contradiction for the gifts that Christ "gave" are the gifts that men "received," and this is Paul's inspired interpretation of the Psalm.
- C. **Vv. 9-10** are a reference to the incarnation of Christ.
  - 1. They testify to his pre-existence (John 1:1-4) in that he "descended."
  - 2. They testify, perhaps, to his death in that he "descended into the lower parts of the earth," i.e., a reference to paradise. Alternatively, it could reference only his existence in the flesh.
  - 3. Most certainly, they testify to his ascension in that "He ascended on high."
  - 4. They also testify to *when* these gifts were given.
- D. **Vs. 11** identifies these "gifts" as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. First Corinthians 12:28 also identifies these as being among the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
  - 1. An important question arises regarding the exact nature of these gifts:
    - a. Were the gifts the functions themselves — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers?
      - 1) *Colly Caldwell*: "The gifts referred to here are functionaries (or functions): apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers." (172)

- b. Were these gifts the men appointed to fill these functions?
    - c. Were these gifts the miraculous endowments to perform these functions in a first century context?
  2. My judgment is, given the promises of Jesus in John (14:16-17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-15), the miraculous gifts promised (Acts 2:16-18; 8:14-17; 19:6) that it is a combination of all three, but especially the miraculous endowments.
- E. **Vs. 12** identifies the purpose of these gifts.
  1. “For the equipping of the saints”
    - a. “For” is *pros* which preposition is a marker of purpose; hence, “for the purpose of” (Louw-Nida, 1:784)
    - b. The purpose? “The equipping of the saints.” Equipping (*katarismos*), means to make someone completely adequate or sufficient for something... to cause to be fully qualified...” (Louw-Nida, 1:679)
    - c. These gifts, then, were for the purpose training/equipping the saints adequately and sufficiently.
  2. “For the work of service”
    - a. “For” is *eis*, a preposition that always looks forward, thus toward or, with a view to.
    - b. “Work” is *ergon*, meaning duty “that a person is obliged to perform for moral or legal reasons” (BSL). It seems to imply responsibility.
    - c. “Service” is *diakonia*, suggesting “work done by one person or group that benefits another” (BSL)
    - d. The idea being that these gifts (gifted men) trained the saints for their work in the kingdom of God; that they might perform their roles sufficiently, adequately, and with excellence.
  3. “To the building up of the body of Christ”
    - a. “To” is *eis* again, to an end goal.
    - b. “Building up” (*oikodome*) is a construction term meaning “to receive edification, be edified... that the body of Christ might be built up.”
  4. Vs. 12 suggests that these gifts were given for the growing and strengthening the body of Christ in its first century context.
- F. **Vs. 13** “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”
  1. “Until” (*mechri*) is a, “marker of continuance in time up to a point” (BDAG, 644); a particle indicating the terminus *ad quem*: as far as, unto, until” (Thayer, 408).
  2. “The faith” is the gospel. (1 Cor 16:13; Gal 1:23; Jude 3)
  3. I prefer to view this passage as parallel with 1 Corinthians 13:8-13.

#### IV. The Goal Of The Unity Of The Spirit (Eph 4:14-16)

- A. **Vs. 14** indicates that the unity of the church at Ephesus was being challenged by crafty, deceitful men teaching various doctrines.
  1. It is interesting to compare this statement with what is found in 1 Timothy, written about the same time or shortly afterward (A.D. 63 or early A.D. 64)

- a. There were false teachers present teaching strange doctrines (1 Tim 1:3)
- b. Some had rejected the truth and “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander” (1 Tim 1:19-20)
- c. Some women were not dressing modestly (1 Tim 2:9-10), nor acknowledging their submissive role (1 Tim 2:11-15), either/both of these were a threat to unity.
- d. There were leadership problems (1 Tim 3; 5:17-25).
- e. A warning of apostasy because some were paying attention to “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1-5)
- f. There were problems regarding the treatment of widows (1 Tim 5:1-16), and likely younger widows causing unrest (1 Tim 5:13).
- g. There were some creating unrest among the servant population (1 Tim 6:1-9), and coveteousness was at the root of a lot of it.
- h. These things do not typically generate overnight and likely were the same things about which Paul was concerned in Ephesians 4:14

**B. Vs. 15** Paul gives the solution in two short statements.

1. Speak the truth in love
2. Grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.

**C. Vs. 16** How then, was unity to be attained and maintained?

1. Like boards cut for a building, it was going to take uniquely suited people.
2. Each person active and working.
3. Each person doing their part.

### Conclusion

- I. In one of the songs of ascents David, the sweet singer of Israel, proclaimed, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).
  - A. Peace and unity are two of the most precious commodities to adorn our human existence.
  - B. David declared that unity is one of the few things that is both good and pleasant.
- II. All of us want to enjoy peace and unity and be a part of an active, thriving congregation of God’s people. Indeed, it is a great blessing. But to obtain peace and unity, and then to preserve it, is a great responsibility and requires a lot of diligent effort.
- III. As I read this passage, there are a number of things that come to my mind.
  - A. Peace and unity cannot be obtained nor preserved at the expense of truth. (cf. 1 Thess 4:1-3,8; Rom 16:17)
  - B. Unity is not optional among believers, it is a command. (cf. Heb 12:14; 1 Cor 1:10; 3:16-17)
  - C. Unity does not come nor is it maintained by accident. It takes diligent work. (cf. Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim 4:1,6; 2 Tim 2:14; 2:23-26; Phil 4:2-3)
  - D. Unity is not perpetually guaranteed.
    1. Uniting a man and woman in a wedding ceremony does not forever guarantee that a divorce will never occur.
    2. Just as a marriage must be maintained daily, unity among brethren must be fostered, nurtured, and kept intact!

- IV. Likewise, there are some things that hinder or destroy unity.
- A. Preaching and/or practicing false doctrine. (cf. Rom 1:16-17; Gal 1:6-8; 1 Tim 1:3-4; 2 Tim 2:16-18; 2:16-18; 3:5-9; Tit 1:9-11,13; Jude 17-21)
  - B. A party spirit. (1 Cor 1:11-12; 4:6)
  - C. Love of preeminence. (3 Jn 9; Tit 1:7)
  - D. Idleness.
    - 1. Associated with busybodies and gossips. (2 Thess 3:11; 1 Tim 5:13)
    - 2. Gives occasion for fault-finding.
  - E. Binding one's own opinions on others.
    - 1. Unfortunately, there are some who haven't learned to determine the difference between matters of faith and matters of personal judgments
    - 2. "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things love."
- V. It is amazing to me that, when we talk about the marks of the N.T. church (especially as God wants it to be) we talk only about the doctrinal pillars, the work of the church, it's worship, and organization.
- VI. It seems to me that we need to be sure and add love for one another (John 13:34-35) and oneness with one another/unity (John 17:20-21). How can we claim to be the Lord's church if we "bite and devour one another.?" (Gal 5:15).

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