

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON FORTY-ONE)

“ONE BODY”

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

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

In previous **Lessons**, we stated that in verses **1-3** of **Ephesians** chapter **4**, the Apostle Paul emphasizes **The Grace of Unity**. In verses **4-6**, to which we will now turn our attention, he highlights **The Ground of Unity**.

Although Paul is exhorting the believers in Ephesus to “*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*” it is important to note that he is not speaking of unity at any price. If we are to preserve the unity of the

Spirit, we need to know what are the central tenets of the faith that unite us as a Body, and we need to hold tenaciously to these truths.

There are many persons, (some with good intentions and others with evil intentions), who desire to unite believers in a way that is not biblical. For example, they will say: “Let’s forget about doctrine and just love one another.” But Paul would not have agreed with such a position. It is significant that he did not discuss unity in any detail in the first 3 chapters of this letter; he delayed doing so until he had laid a solid doctrinal foundation.

As we noted in an earlier **Lesson**, this is always the proper order, for it is only in doctrine that believers become aware of all the resources of grace that they possess, which alone can enable them to obey any exhortation. Until persons have been exposed to sound doctrine, it is unreasonable to expect them to live an exalted Christian life. Persons must first know **who they are** in Christ before they are told **how they ought to live** for Christ. Paul was acutely aware of this, therefore all of his letters contain a beautiful balance between doctrine and duty. This letter to the believers in Ephesus is the perfect example.

THE SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE OF PAUL’S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-6
Doctrinal	Practical
The Position of the Believer	The Practice of the Believer
The Believer’s Spiritual Wealth	The Believer’s Spiritual Walk
The Believer’s Blessings	The Believer’s Behaviour

How God Sees Us in Christ	How the World Should See Christ in Us
The Privileges of the Believer	The Responsibilities of the Believer
The Work of Christ in Us	The Work of Christ Through us

While not all believers agree on every minor matter of Christian doctrine, they all should agree on the foundational truths of the faith. Unity built on anything other than Scriptural truth is standing on a very weak foundation. When we have laid a solid foundation of doctrinal truth, we can focus our attention on the positive doctrinal truths which form the foundation of Christian unity, instead of focusing on the differences and “majoring on the minors.”

Paul lists the **7** basic spiritual realities that unite all true believers in the one Body of Christ. These are **One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God**. All these basic spiritual realities of oneness should serve to motivate believers to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Whenever we are tempted to break the unity of the faith, we need to remember these **7** unifying truths.

The repetition of the word “*one*” serves to emphasize the unity. Commenting on this, the “Prince of Preachers,” **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**, remarked, “If there were two lords, you might be divided into two parties; if there were two faiths, you might split up into two sections; if there were two baptisms, you might be right in having two denominations; if there were two fathers, there might be two families; if there were two indwelling spirits, there would be, and there must be, two sorts of people; but, in the true Church of Jesus Christ, there is ‘one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’”

The word “*One*” is the translation of the Greek word **heis** which describes that which is united as one in contrast to that which is divided or consisting of separate parts.

There is **One Body**. This is, of course, a reference to the Mystical Body of Christ, the invisible Church, composed of believers saved between the Day of Pentecost, when the Church was formed and the return of Jesus Christ. There is only one body of true believers, with no class, racial, cultural, gender, national, or language differences. There are no “first class” and “second class” citizens in the Body of Christ. Every believer is a brother or sister in that Church, and has an equal right with all others to its privileges. Since they were made one by the purpose and plan of God, they should be one in feeling also. Every believer should be ready to acknowledge every other believer as a fellow-heir of God and a fellow-joint heir with Christ, no matter what his or her nationality, colour, class, or gender may be.

William Barclay, the late Church of Scotland minister, wrote, “There is one body. Christ is the head and the Church is the body. No brain can work through a body which is split into fragments. Unless there is a coordinated oneness in the body, the designs of the head are frustrated. The oneness of the Church is essential for the work of Christ. That does not need to be a mechanical oneness of administration and of human organization; but it does need to be a oneness founded on a common love of Christ and of every part for the other.”

Brothers and sisters, Paul is not making an appeal here; he is stating a fact. There is, one body—the Body of Christ. All believers are “*in Christ*.” They all constitute, not many bodies, but one. The classical statement of this truth is found in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**. We will consider the rendering of the **New English Translation**:

12 For just as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body—though many—are one body, so too is Christ.

13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body. Whether Jews or Greeks or slaves or free, we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

14 For in fact the body is not a single member, but many.

15 If the foot says, "Since I am not a hand, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that.

16 And if the ear says, "Since I am not an eye, I am not part of the body," it does not lose its membership in the body because of that.

17 If the whole body were an eye, what part would do the hearing? If the whole were an ear, what part would exercise the sense of smell?

18 But as a matter of fact, God has placed each of the members in the body just as he decided.

19 If they were all the same member, where would the body be?

20 So now there are many members, but one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor in turn can the head say to the foot, "I do not need you."

22 On the contrary, those members that seem to be weaker are essential,

23 and those members we consider less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our unpresentable members are clothed with dignity,

24 but our presentable members do not need this. Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member,

25 so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have mutual concern for one another.

26 If one member suffers, everyone suffers with it. If a member is honored, all rejoice with it.

27 Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it.

The American theologian, **James Montgomery Boice**, made the following insightful and compelling remarks in respect of the comparison of the Church to the human body: “Comparing the church to a body is particularly appropriate in this passage, however, for a body is something that works together, even though it is composed of many diverse parts. Moreover, its unity is organic. That is, it is achieved not by joining a number of diverse parts or pieces in the way one would make a machine, but by growth. The church is not a diesel engine or a watch or an airplane. It is a body. It grows by the multiplication of cells.”

Since all true believers are not members of any one external denomination or organization, it is obvious that the one body of which Paul speaks, is not an outward visible one, but a spiritual body of which Christ is the head and all true believers are members. It is very possible for an individual to be a member of a denomination or an organization, and yet not be a member of the Body of Christ! Indeed it is possible for a person to be a leader in a “Christian” denomination or organization without ever having been genuinely converted!

Our Lord made reference to such persons in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Brothers and sisters, it is far more important to me that my name is written in “the Lamb’s Book of Life,” than that I serve as the Pastor of **The Grace Workshop Ministries!**

In **John 17:20-21**, the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for a **visible** oneness in the Church as a witness to the world. He said, “*Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; **That they all may be one**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be **one in us**: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*”

We should read and understand this prayer as a prayer for us today. This is a prayer for the unity of all believers. The Devil desires and works to divide us; Christ desires and works to unite us.

Jesus prayed this prayer to the end that “*the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*” Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that unity multiplies the effectiveness of the church’s witness. A divided church loses its ability to be an effective witness for Jesus Christ. Eventually, such a church becomes irrelevant and is in grave danger of having its candlestick or lampstand removed (**Revelation 2:5**).

It would be an interesting exercise for us to insert a list of names from our own congregation into a prayer similar to that of Jesus. “Lord, I pray that Paul and Andrew, Joseph and Delroy, Barbara and Michelle, Annette and Beverley, and me, may be one, as You and the Father are one.”

Ephesians 4:4-6 interprets for us the meaning of Jesus’ prayer. Our Lord never asked for a man-made union of churches into one grand organization, but He prayed for a Spirit-engendered, Christ centered, God-controlled unity in the living organism, the Body of Christ.

There is a sense in which our Lord’s prayer for the unity of believers has been answered. In **Galatians 3:28**, Paul writes, “*There is neither Jew*

nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” But it is clear that His prayer has not yet been **fully** answered. The fragmentation began as early as Acts chapter 6, when the Grecian or Hellenistic believers complained against the Hebrew believers because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. While that conflict was quickly resolved, other conflicts occurred, deepened and spread. How terribly has the current model of competing denominations diminished the witness of the Church! We desperately need to repent—and to hear the prayer of Jesus over and over again: *“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”*

The one Body of Christ is the model for the many local churches that God has established across the world. The fact that a person is a member of the Body of Christ does not excuse him or her from belonging to a local body, for it is in the local body that he or she blesses other believers by exercising his or her spiritual gifts and benefits from the spiritual gifts of others. It is in the local body that he or she helps others to grow spiritually and is helped to do the same.

Paul says *“There is one body.”* He does not say, “There is one denomination.” But even without him saying so, there are some denominations, which claim that they are the one!

Interestingly, Jesus Christ did not build a denomination or an organization. In **Matthew 16:18**, he said, *“upon this rock I will build **my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

Properly speaking, the Church of Jesus Christ is not an **organization** but an **organism**. What is the difference between an organization and an organism? We can illustrate the difference by considering a chair and our physical body. A chair is an organization of lifeless material, but our physical body has life. Thus, it is an organism. Life makes our body an organism. The Church is the Body of Christ, and as an organism it is a living entity. This does not negate the fact that any group of Christian

believers who are relationally linked together, will, of necessity, need to organize themselves in order to effectively carry out the work of the Kingdom of God.

The American Baptist Pastor **Clarence Larkin**, made the following observation: “The fact that the Church is a “Body” made up of “living members” shows that it is not an **organization**, but an **organism**. An **organization** is made up of distinct units like the doors, windows, roof, floors, etc., of a building, that may be removed and replaced by new parts without destroying the integrity of the building; but a human body is an **organism**. You cannot remove an eye, or ear, or arm, or foot, or even a fingernail or tooth, without destroying the integrity of the body and causing a mutilation. So, we see from this for Christ to lose one member of His Body (the Church) is to mutilate it.”

It is an uncontested fact that many denominations and organizations have become extinct. But the Church established by Jesus Christ will never become extinct.

The Body of Christ is eternal in its calling, heavenly in its conception, divine in its creation, and supernatural in its constitution. The living members of this Body have been called out of every kindred, tongue, people and nation. They differ in nationality, color, language, education, training, ability, temperament, and outlook. Through the human blood running in their veins they have inherited dislikes, prejudices and animosities that separate them as far as the east is from the west. But through the blood of the Saviour and the baptism of the Holy Spirit they are united to Christ as living members of His Body.

In **Ephesians 5:30** Paul says, *“For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones.”* Being organically united with Christ, the Head, each member is then made one with every other member of the Body. The oneness is so complete that we are literally a part of the life of each other. United to the Head there is one mind, one heart, one spirit. Because the Church is the Body of Christ, Christ loves the church. If our

Lord loves His church, so too must we, for we are called to imitate Christ. If we do not love the church, we do not love Christ.

The fact that the church is the body of Christ also tells us something vital about how Christ works in our world. As individuals, we accomplish our goals through the use of our bodies. We use our arms, legs, minds, and other parts of our bodies to do our jobs, show love to our family members and friends and so forth. Similarly, Christ carries out His saving purposes for the world through His Body, the church. We are His eyes and ears, hands and feet, heart and mouth as it were, through whom He ministers His love to the world and takes His truth to the end of the earth.

When our Lord Christ entered the world, He became a man and took on a physical body. In **Hebrews 2:14** we read the following:

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he likewise shared in their humanity, so that through death he could destroy the one who holds the power of death (that is, the devil),

15 and set free those who were held in slavery all their lives by their fear of death.

16 For surely his concern is not for angels, but he is concerned for Abraham's descendants.

17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in things relating to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.
(New English Translation)

Through His physical body, Jesus demonstrated the love of God especially through His sacrificial death on the Cross. After His bodily ascension, He continues His work in the world through His Mystical Body-the Church. The Church now demonstrates the love of God to a

lost and dying world. In this way, the Church functions as the Body of Christ.

There are at least 10 reasons why the Church may be called the “*Body of Christ.*”

1 Members of the Body of Christ are joined to Christ in salvation (**Ephesians 4:15-16**).

2 Members of the Body of Christ follow Christ as their Head (**Ephesians 1:22-23**).

3 Members of the Body of Christ are the physical representation of Christ in this world. The Church is the organism through which Christ manifests His life to the world today.

4 Members of the Body of Christ are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of Christ (**Romans 8:9**).

5 Members of the Body of Christ possess a diversity of gifts suited to particular functions (**1 Corinthians 12:4-31**).

6 Members of the Body of Christ share a common bond with all other Christians, regardless of background, race, or ministry (**1 Corinthians 12:25-27**).

7 Members of the Body of Christ are secure in their salvation. For a believer to lose his salvation, God would have to perform an “amputation” on the Body of Christ! (**John 10:28-30**)

8 Members of the Body of Christ partake of Christ’s death and resurrection (**Colossians 2:12**).

9 Members of the Body of Christ share Christ’s inheritance (**Romans 8:17**).

10 Members of the Body of Christ receive the gift of Christ's righteousness (**Romans 5:17**).

Next Thursday, Lord willing, one of our medical doctors will be examining this matter of the "One Body," from the perspective of the human body.