

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

(LESSON FORTY-FOUR)

“ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM”

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 our previous **Lesson**, we stated that in **Ephesians** chapter **4**, the Apostle Paul deals with the fundamental nature and purpose of the Church, and how the Church relates to the world. In the first 3 verses, he emphasizes **The Grace of Unity**; in verses **4-6**, he emphasizes **The Ground of Unity**.

Brothers and sisters, we are not asked to create or manufacture unity. Those who have attempted to do so have failed miserably. It has not worked because it cannot work! Unity does not come merely from being

together in the same worship facility. Unity does not come merely from greeting each other warmly when we gather for worship. Unity does not come merely from knowing each other's name. Unity does not come merely from sharing a meal together on a fifth Sunday. Unity is created by the Holy Spirit and by Him alone.

In **John 17:20-23** our Lord, in His High Priestly prayer, compared the unity of believers with each other, to the perfect unity which the Son has with the Father. Such unity cannot be legislated or produced by the mechanics of an organization. **It is produced by the Holy Spirit.**

In verse **3** Paul writes, *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* The *“unity of the Spirit”* does not describe an external, ecclesiastical union, but an internal, spiritual unity. The Holy Spirit has created a basic unity in the Body as a result of His placing of each member in Christ. It was the Holy Spirit who baptized, or placed, or positioned us all into the Body when we were saved. This is a unity that nothing can destroy, even though in our experience, we sometimes behave as if this fact were not true. Paul pleads with the saints at Ephesus and the Holy Spirit pleads with all of us, to guard the unity which the Holy Spirit has produced and live in harmony with each other, so that the unsaved may see our oneness in Christ and God may be glorified!

Mohandas Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, politician, social activist, and writer, who became the leader of the nationalist movement against the British rule of India. As such, he came to be considered the father of his country. Gandhi is internationally esteemed for his doctrine of nonviolent protest which inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

Even though Gandhi was a practicing Hindu, he was intrigued with Christianity. In his reading of the Gospels, he was impressed by Jesus Christ and desired to know more about Him.

The story is told that on one Sunday morning, Gandhi decided that he would visit one of the Christian churches in Calcutta. Upon seeking entrance to the church sanctuary, he was stopped at the door by the ushers. He was told that he was not welcome, nor would he be permitted to attend this particular church as it was for high-caste Indians and whites only. He was neither high caste, nor was he white. It is believed that because of this rejection, Gandhi turned his back on Christianity.

He rejected the Christian faith, and never again considered the claims of Christ. He was turned off by the sin of segregation that was practiced by the church. It was due to this experience that Gandhi later declared, "I'd be a Christian if it were not for the Christians."

On one occasion, when asked what he thought was the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India, he replied, "Christians."

Brothers and sisters, we must bear in mind that the Church-the Body of Christ, has been designed by God to be the masterpiece of His grace and the example of what the reconciled universe of the future will look like. Believers are therefore expected to live in a manner consistent with this divine purpose. To keep, or preserve or maintain this unity means that it must be visibly evident to all who carefully observe us. If there is a genuine unity of the Spirit among us, it will manifest itself transparently. We have a responsibility before God to ensure that this is so, and we have the enabling power of the same Holy Spirit to help us.

When we live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit, we are damaging the gracious, reconciling work of Christ and we are grieving the Holy Spirit. It is tantamount to us saying that the sacrificial death of Christ, by which the relationship between God and sinful humanity has been restored, is of no real consequence to us!

In verses **4-6**, Paul lists 7 basic spiritual realities, or 7 elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. These are **One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God**. The ground or basis of the Church's unity arises from the

fact that there is but one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. All these elements of oneness should have the effect of persuading believers to make every effort to keep, or preserve, or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Whenever we are tempted to injure the unity of the Spirit, we need to remember these 7 unifying truths.

We have looked at the first 3 of these unifying truths, one Body, one Spirit, and one hope in previous **Lessons**. In this **Lesson**, we will consider the truth that there is **One Lord**.

In **Ephesians 4:5**, Paul writes, *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism.”* In highlighting the truth that there is one Lord, Paul’s point is that there ought to be unity among believers, because we all have one Lord. There is not one Lord for the Jew and a different one for the Greek; there is not one Lord for masters and an a different one for slaves; there is not one Lord for the white and a different one for the black; there is not one Lord for the rich and a different one for the poor; there is not one Lord for the educated and a different one for the uneducated. In **Romans 10:12-13** Paul wrote, *“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* The one Lord has the right to rule over one as much as over another.

The church is to be united on the basis of the foundational truth that there is *“one Lord.”* This is of course, Jesus Christ, Who is *“Lord of all”* according to **Acts 10:36**. He died for us all, He lives **for** us all, He lives **in** us all, He intercedes for us all, and one day He will return for us all. When we walk in the light of this truth, we will surrender to the necessity of living for Him as our **one Lord!** When our hearts are knit together in spiritual oneness, as we focus upon **one Lord**, the world will be impacted by the great grace flowing in and through such a diverse group of believers who compose **one body**, the church!

The word *“Lord,”* is the translation of the Greek word **kurios** which describes one who has sovereign, uncontested power and absolute

authority. It refers to one who has absolute ownership. It is the one who is in charge by virtue of possession.

Jesus Christ is exalted because He is Lord. In **Philippians 2:9-11**, Paul writes the following concerning Christ:

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

*11 And that every tongue should confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.*

According to **Romans 10:9-13**, salvation is based on a confession of Jesus Christ as Lord:

*9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth **the Lord Jesus**, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

*13 For whosoever shall call upon **the name of the Lord** shall be saved.*

When Thomas saw the risen Jesus, he referred to Him as “**My Lord and my God**” (**John 20:28**).

When Paul was struck down on the Damascus road, he “*heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*” In response he

asked, “*Who art thou, Lord?*” And the **Lord** answered, “*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*” (Acts 9:4-5).

In **1 Corinthians 12:3**, Paul insisted that no one could call Jesus “*Lord*” unless the Holy Spirit gave the person that insight. Of course, in this context, “calling Jesus Lord,” means more than simply making a verbal expression. Paul is not saying that no one has the physical ability to say that Jesus is Lord unless he or she is aided by the Holy Spirit, since many persons say this. What he means is that no individual will be disposed to **genuinely** acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord, unless they have been brought to this state by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Every single person who genuinely acknowledges that “Jesus is Lord,” is a saved person, for it is impossible for any person to do so who has not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

We have noted that there are 7 basic spiritual realities, or 7 elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. Interestingly, the truth that there is **one Lord** is at the centre, or the heart of this sevenfold unity. There are 3 elements listed before it and 3 after it. This is a necessity in the nature of the case, because everything centres in and around the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal purpose of the Father and the mighty power of the Holy Spirit are directed toward making the Lord Jesus a living reality within the believer individually and personally, and within the Church corporately. It is difficult to believe that two Christians can claim to love and serve the same Lord, and yet not be able to walk together in unity.

This “*one Lord*” is the Head of the Church, which automatically excludes any other temporal head of the visible Body of Christ. The “*one Lord*” will never delegate the headship over the Church. He alone is the Head and He always will be.

The fifth of the 7 basic spiritual realities, or elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ is the truth that there is **One Faith**. It is likely that by “*one faith*,” Paul is referring to both the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine, as well as to the principle of faith

by means of which all believers enter into salvation. **Subjectively**, it refers to our experience of faith; there is no salvation apart from faith. **Objectively**, it refers to the content of faith or what we believe, the gospel. In other words, every believer should be zealous to preserve the unity of the Spirit because they all hold to the same essential doctrines of salvation and also because they have the same personal belief in Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord. He is the One who brought them into His Kingdom and it is by and in His strength that they walk daily. Ultimately, the two are not mutually exclusive. In order to be saved, every person must affirm the same basic body of truth and they must also have the same child-like trust in Jesus Christ.

With regard to the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine, Paul is contending that there is one settled body of truth deposited by Christ in His church. It is to this that Jude made reference in verse **3** of his epistle: *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of **the common salvation**, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was once delivered unto the saints.”* The one faith is the content of the revealed Word of God. Lack of faithful and careful study and teaching of God’s Word, the traditions of men, and the influence of the world, may do violence to sacred Scripture and lead men and women into great error.

The early Christians recognized a body of basic doctrine that they taught, guarded, and committed to others. In **2 Timothy 2:2** Paul writes the following to Timothy, his “son in the gospel,” *“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”* Believers may differ in some matters of interpretation and church practice; but all true Christians agree on what constitutes “the faith,” and to depart from “the faith” is to cause disunity within the Body of Christ.

We are not to believe diverse doctrines where the core of the gospel is concerned. We believe that God Almighty sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to become like us and to die for our salvation. And it is through

faith in His finished work of atonement alone, not in anything that we have done or can do, that we are saved. That one gospel joins believers together across all barriers of time, nationality, race, sex, gender and anything else we can imagine. If we have “*one faith*,” then we ought to be able to stand together before the world and give united testimony to God’s saving work in Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks **objectively** of “the faith” in **Galatians 1:23**. Alluding to himself and his conversion he writes, “*But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth **the faith** which once he destroyed.*”

In chapter **3** and verses **22-26** of the same epistle, he speaks **subjectively** of “faith:”

*22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise **by faith** of Jesus Christ might be given **to them that believe**.*

*23 But before **faith** came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.*

*24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified **by faith**.*

25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

*26 For ye are all the children of God **by faith** in Christ Jesus.*

“The faith” gives us a settled **body of truth** to believe. “Faith” gives us a **person** in whom to believe. When we truly believe in Jesus Christ, we accept the body of basic doctrine contained in the revealed Word of God.

The sixth basic spiritual reality, or element of oneness that unites all true believers in the Body of Christ, is the truth that there is **One Baptism**. The meaning of “*one baptism*” and whether it refers to water baptism or baptism in the Holy Spirit, has been much debated by Bible

scholars over the years. It is my opinion that since Paul, in this context, is discussing the Body of Christ, “*one baptism*” is probably a reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which occurs at the point of a believer’s conversion. The believing sinner is **baptized**, or placed into the Body of Christ.

We read of this act of the Holy Spirit in **1 Corinthians 12:13**: “*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*” This is not an experience that takes place subsequent to conversion, nor is it an experience that we are to pray for or seek after. We have already been baptized by the Spirit at conversion. As far as the **One Body** is concerned, there is **One Baptism**, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, for it is this baptism which places us in the Body.

If the apostle meant one **water** baptism, why did he not also make mention of the **Lord’s Supper**, the other sacrament of the Church. Why didn’t he say, “There is one baptism and one bread?” The context of verses **4-6**, seem to be concerned with supernatural things-**One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God**. These are all immaterial, unsubstantial things, having nothing to do with human beings. Water baptism, on the other hand is performed by human beings for human beings.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that water baptism has not proven to be a particularly unifying factor in the Church, and in this passage, Paul is dealing with the 7 basic spiritual realities, or elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. Even in his time, baptism seemed to have been a source of disunity. We see evidence of this in his first letter to the **Corinthians**. In chapter **1** and verses **10-17**, he wrote the following:

10 I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose.

11 For members of Chloe's household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrels among you.

12 Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ."

13 Is Christ divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul?

14 I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,

15 so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name!

16 (I also baptized the household of Stephanus. Otherwise, I do not remember whether I baptized anyone else.)

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—and not with clever speech, so that the cross of Christ would not become useless.

(New English Translation)

Brothers and sisters, the entire context of verses **4-6** is supernatural. The unifying element of "*one baptism*" is preceded by that of "*one faith*," an aspect of which is the faith exercised by the believer in salvation. I believe that the words "*one baptism*," could be translated as "one placing into." That is, in response to our act of faith, we were all placed by the Holy Spirit into the Body of which Christ is the Head. This is one of the unities vitally related to our salvation, and upon which Paul bases his plea for unity in the Church. There was and is one common "placing" into the Body of Christ.

In the context also of Paul's emphasis in this epistle on the mystery of the Church which has been revealed, "**One Baptism**" refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which places each individual believer into Christ, each one in turn together forming the Body of Christ, the Church.

Every believer is united to Christ and to every other believer through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Of all the many ministries of the Holy Spirit, this baptism, which places each believer into the Body of Christ, is the most fundamental and vital.

According to the “**Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**,” The verb **baptizo** pictures the introduction or placing of a person into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter his or her condition or his or her relationship to their previous environment or condition. This is exactly what the baptism of the Holy Spirit does for the believing sinner. The **second** chapter of **Ephesians** testifies eloquently of this. Let us read the rendering provided by the **New English Translation**:

1 And although you were dead in your offenses and sins,

2 in which you formerly lived according to this world’s present path, according to the ruler of the domain of the air, the ruler of the spirit that is now energizing the sons of disobedience,

3 among whom all of us also formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest...

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us,

5 even though we were dead in offenses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved!—

6 and he raised us up together with him and seated us together with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

7 to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

10 For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.

11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh—who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” that is performed on the body by human hands—

12 that you were at that time without the Messiah, alienated from the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who used to be far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition, the hostility,

15 when he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace,

16 and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed.

17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,

18 so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household,

20 because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, it was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that introduced or placed us into a new environment and into union with God which has drastically altered our state and condition? Our relationship to the fallen, adamic nature, the world system and the devil have also been altered. Since we have all experienced the “*one baptism*” and have all benefitted from the blessings that are related to this one baptism, we should endeavor to keep, or preserve, or maintain the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.