



## Ephesians 4:4-6

### Basis for Church Unity

In the opening verses of Ephesians chapter four the apostle Paul is stressing the unity of the church. He will then tell us the purpose of the church and our responsibility as members.

The seven-fold foundation for church unity is described in Ephesians 4:4-6.

The church is one because it is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

In the first three verses he has stressed keeping or preserving the unity. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Characteristics of church unity are Christian humility, gentleness, patience and putting up with one another.

Obviously, Paul did not want us to miss this oneness or unity in the body of Christ.

### ONE BODY

There is one body, not many bodies.

Paul has already discussed the work of our Lord Jesus removing barriers, and the hostilities between the Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ. He has made both groups into one. He did this to create in himself one new man out of two thus making peace, and to reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by which the hostility has been killed (Ephesians 2:15-16 NET). This Jesus accomplished through his atoning sacrifice at Calvary.

There is only one mystical spiritual body of Christ. It is a growing organism sometimes referred to as a body, at other times in Scriptures as a temple, or building, and the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (2:19-22).

All true believers are in Christ and united in the spiritual body of Christ.

Now the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (1:23 NET). The church is his body and he fills his church entirely with his presence and power. Paul writes in Colossians 1:18 that Christ is the head of the body, the church. ”

This is the fulfillment of Jesus prayer just before he went to the cross the next morning. He prayed for believers everywhere, including you and me. Hr

next morning. He prayed for believers everywhere, including you and me. He prayed, That they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me. The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one —I in them and you in me —that they may be completely one, so that the world will know that you sent me, and you have loved them just as you have loved me (John 17:21-23 NET).

In Romans 12:4-5 Paul is reflecting on the many members of the one body and how their gifts are to be used within the body. For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another (NET). The Holy Spirit brought about this unity when he placed us in the body. He knows the gifts he has chosen for us and how he wants us to function within the body of Christ. We who are many are one body (1 Cor. 10:17 NET). In the context Paul is referring to the body of Christ.

A little further Paul continues his discussion about many members serving in one body. For just as the body is one and yet has many members, all the members of the body —though many —are one body, so too is Christ (1 Cor. 12:12 NET). How did this come about? Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it (v. 27 NET).

The emphasis in all of these passages is on the unity of the body of Christ. We are many members and we have many gifts, not all the same, but we are one in the body.

There was a lot of commotion going on in the church at Corinth and Paul urges that there should be no division in the body, but that they should all care for one another (v. 25). Don't let these gifts become a distraction in the body (vv. 28-31).

Only the Holy Spirit can produce this body and its unity. It is not an organization of many churches or denominations. It is a unity of the Spirit enjoyed by true believers bound together in a common bond of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus.

We have unity in the church because there is one body which is sustained by one Spirit.

## **ONE SPIRIT**

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13a NET). This is the baptism by the Holy Spirit. We were all made to drink of the one Spirit (v. 13c NET). He has placed all believers into a vital union with Christ. We are made a member of the body of which Christ is the living head.

At the same time the Holy Spirit regenerated us, adopted us, became the down payment and took up residence in us. These were all different actions, but nevertheless took place at the same moment in time when we believed on Christ as our savior.

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The Holy Spirit dwells in all believers in Christ. People will sometimes ask, "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" That is like asking, "Have you been born again?" or "Do you know Christ as your personal savior?" It is impossible for anyone to be a child and not have the Holy Spirit dwelling within him or her. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him (Romans 8:9b NET). The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ all refer to the same person, the third person of the Holy Trinity. This is the one who lives in you. Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you (v. 11 NET).

Paul is referring to the church in 1 Corinthians 3:16 when he says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you" (NET). Moreover, in 6:19 he uses the same imagery to refer to the individual believer. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (NET). Christ purchased you with his own blood. We have access through Christ Jesus "in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

No wonder the apostle Paul admonishes the church to be very careful how we treat the Holy Spirit. We must watch our attitude and behavior so we do not grieve him (Eph. 4:30). "You must put away every kind of bitterness, anger, wrath, quarreling, and evil slanderous talk" (v. 31 NET). Since those actions grieve the Spirit, we can promote unity by being "kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ Jesus also forgave us" (v. 32 NET). This is how we "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16-18, 25). How tragic when Christians act in such a way that the work of the Holy Spirit is quenched when he is dealing with the souls of unbelievers (1 Thess. 5:19).

Therefore, let us be careful how we live our lives and make sure we are "filled by the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). We are to be filled by means of the Spirit, i.e. under his control.

God does his work in, by and through his Spirit (Zech. 4:6).

The church is one because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ. There is one body of Christ, one Spirit of God who created it and sustains it, and one hope of your calling.

## ONE HOPE

There is unity in the church because you "were called to the one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4 NET).

Because of the inward effectual call of God by the Spirit, we believed on Christ and received the free gift of eternal life. This was an act of God's grace. The Holy Spirit illuminated our spiritual eyes so we could perceive and understand "what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18 NET).

The effectual working of the Holy Spirit caused us to repent and believe on Christ. It was the "exercise of his immense strength" that changed our hearts and placed us in the body of Christ. The effectual call is always an action which issues in the desired goal or eternal purpose of God in the individual. This divine activity was seen in the resurrection of Christ (Eph. 1:20) and in our lives when we heard the gospel truth and believed on Christ. In that moment the Holy Spirit took up residence within us as the "down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14 NET).

That was the beginning of something grand. We live in expectation of the blessed hope and soon appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of that blessed hope, our glorification with Christ will take place. We will be like Christ when he returns.

We wait for the happy fulfillment of our hope in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13 NET). This blessed hope is the appearing of the glory of our Savior when he returns again. The Lord Jesus is our great God and Savior. God and Savior are referring to the same person, Jesus Christ. He is coming again.

We do not know when Christ is coming back to this earth, but we can have confidence that whenever it is revealed we will be like him, because we will see him just as he is (1 John 3:2 NET).

What a joy to know that we are now the children of God, and when Christ Jesus appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is. When Christ comes we will at last attain God's eternal purpose for us.

The church has a confident expectation that the best is yet to come. This unites us in the hope set before us as an anchor for the soul.

We are one in the body of Christ, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord . . . .

## ONE LORD

Christians believe in one God, not three. The apostle Paul was clear about this when he wrote, "There is no God, but one. For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we live, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6 NET).

No one can say, "Jesus Christ is Lord" except by illumination of the Holy Spirit. When we declare, "Jesus Christ is my Lord" we are saying he is the rightful owner, absolute Lord of my life for time and eternity.

The word "Lord" (*Kurios*) signifies having power and authority. It is the idea of Lord, Master, owner, and can refer to the absolute title of deity as in the representation word for the Hebrew *Yahweh*. The full significance rests upon the resurrection of Christ Jesus (Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 12:9; 14:9; Acts 4:12; Phil. 2:11). The readers of the New Testament understood the name "Lord" to be the great august title of the God of Israel. The apostle used it equivalent to *Yahweh*. "Jesus is Lord," means "Jesus is *Yahweh*." Christ Jesus is Master, Owner, and Lord in the most absolute sense of the word (Phil. 2:11). He is God. He is the second person of the Godhead.

As Lord, Jesus Christ has sovereign rights as the absolute owner of my life. He obtained those rights when he died and paid in full our payment for sin. He redeemed us and is now our owner. He purchased us (1 Cor. 6:20). The apostle Peter wrote: "You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed—not by perishable things like silver or gold, but by precious blood like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb, namely Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19 NET).

Now I belong to Jesus Christ. He is my Master. I am his bondslave.

Only God can make such demands on a person's life. Indeed, Jesus Christ is the Son of God the second person of the Godhead. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12 NET).

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Jesus made it equally clear when he said, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6 NET).

The great climax to the gospel of John comes when the disciple Thomas sees the risen Christ and declares, My Lord and my God (20:28).

All true believers in Christ Jesus confess him as Lord and God. In fact, you cannot be a Christian without believing in your heart and confessing him to be so. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9 NET).

I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is cursed, and no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3 NET).

There is only one Lord and he is the basis of unity in the church. He alone has sovereign rights over his church.

We have unity in the church because there is one body, and one Spirit, just as you too were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith . . . ”

## ONE FAITH

There is only one historical Jesus, and he is the one in whom we have put our faith and trust.

God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11 NET).

All true Christians have made that confession and are resting in him alone for eternal life (Acts 16:31).

There are certain truths that must be held in order to be a Christian. Jesus Christ is Lord.

We are justified by personal faith in Christ Jesus. We accept the revealed fact that we are sinners and the penalty for sin is death. We also accept the truth that Jesus died as our substitute and paid our debt in full (Romans 5:6, 8). We accept God's word when it says the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is for all who believe. We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ” (Romans 3:24 NET).

Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice that covers all our sins. He is the mercy seat or place where the propitiation was accomplished. His atoning death turns away the wrath of God that we truly deserve. On Jesus Christ was laid all of our sins and the wrath of God toward sin was fully satisfied.

How precious is God's promise to all who come to him. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but the wrath remains on him (John 3:36 NET).

Is your faith resting on him alone? He is the only one who can save you. All other names will take you to a place called Hell.

We have church unity because we have one faith in one Savior and one baptism.

## ONE BAPTISM

Which baptism is Paul referring to here? Is it a wet or a dry baptism? Is it immersion in water or the baptism by the Holy Spirit?

Immersion in water saves no one. Water baptism is an outward sign of the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart. It is our personal testimony that we have been identified with Jesus Christ. The ordinance of water baptism symbolizes what the Holy Spirit has already done in our hearts.

The Bible does not teach baptismal regeneration. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:16). For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith (Galatians 3:26 NET).

The one baptism that is part of this seven-fold basis for church unity is the work of the Holy Spirit. There is only one baptism by the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer, and that takes place at the moment of conversion. The baptism takes place at the moment of salvation. The water baptism symbolizes Spirit baptism.

The baptism by the Holy Spirit is when the Holy Spirit places the believer in the body of Christ. You do not experience it, or feel it. However, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. 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 (1 Corinthians 12:13 NET).

This once for all placing in the body occurred potentially at Pentecost. It is not a baptism with the Spirit, but by the Spirit. He is the sole agent. The Spirit is not the element into which we are baptized. This action does not bring the Holy Spirit into us. It is not for power because nothing is applied to us. The baptism by the Holy Spirit is the action whereby the believer is placed into Christ. We become a member of the body of Christ. This same baptism is referred to in Colossians 3:27. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (NET). It took place at regeneration and was by the Holy Spirit, not water. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about this identification with Christ.

Romans 6:3f teaches we were baptized into his death. We were made one with Christ. We were united with him in a vital union in all the value of his death, resurrection and ascension.

Or do you not know that as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:3-5 NET).

The baptism by the Spirit does the work and water symbolizes or pictures what is done.

We are to preserve the church unity because we have been made members of the body by the work of the Holy Spirit, and we can call God our Father.

## ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL BELIEVERS

We have unity in the church because there is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all (Ephesians 4:6 NET).

God is Father of all true believers. He is our Father by spiritual regeneration. I am a child of God because of spiritual birth, not because I have been baptized or because my parents were Christians. I have been born spiritually into his family. We are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26). That is the only way you can become a legitimate child of God and a member of his family. There is simply no other way.

The Bible is very clear about how we become a member of God's family. It is not because we were created by God or born physically. But to all who have received him —those who believe in his name —he has given the right to become God's children —children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God (John 1:12-13 NET). We become members of God's family by personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Here are seven statements that form the solid foundation for church unity. The true church is God's dwelling place; He lives in every believer. Let's be constantly on our guard to not allow any attitude, disposition, behavior, life-style, etc. to disrupt that unity.

## SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. When we realize we are members of one body in Christ we can treat one another with the same love Christ has for his body.
2. When we worship the Triune God we give honor and glory to one Lord, one Spirit, and one God and Father of all true believers. The doctrine of the Trinity is woven throughout this letter of the apostle Paul.
3. When we understand the biblical teaching on the baptism by the Holy Spirit we want him to have full control over our lives so we can preserve the unity of his church.

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