

UPON THE ROCK

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Upon the Rock is published monthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians.

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There Is One Body

By Mark Reynolds

To say that there is something missing in the religious world today is an obvious statement. Even one who does not consider himself a Christian can view the “Christian” world and see that there must be something amiss. What is it? This issue of *Upon the Rock* details the problem, and not only that, gives the solution to the problem as given by the Holy Spirit Himself.

The biggest problem facing the religious world today is a lack of unity. Have you ever wondered why there are so many different churches in our world today, many of them claiming to be Christians, yet each church teaches and worships differently from the others? Can you imagine how this must look to those who do not consider themselves Christians, but would like to learn more about Christ? How can it be possible for there to be literally thousands of churches, all teaching different things, yet all claiming to be pleasing to Christ? The problem is a lack of unity.

Ephesians chapter four gives the solution to the problem of a lack of unity. There are a few things that must be present in our lives and hearts before unity can be achieved: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye were called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering; forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

First we must have a spirit of lowliness, which means we must have a humble opinion of ourselves. This just makes sense. If my attitude is that I am better than others, better than the apostles, better than the Holy Spirit, I will be much more prone to dictate what I want the Bible to teach, rather than allowing the Bible to teach me what God wants me to learn. Without lowliness, people will be trying to be the “head” of the body, a role reserved exclusively for Christ.

A second qualification that must be met before unity can even be discussed is meekness. Meekness is not being cowardly, nor does it mean that one must allow others to walk all over him. In fact, it is just

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

- 1 Hear THE WORD OF GOD - (Romans 10:17;
Matthew 7:24-27).
2. Believe THE WORD OF GOD - (Hebrews 11:6;
Mark 16:15-16).
3. Repent OF YOUR SINS - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke
13:3).
4. Confess THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD -
(Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).
5. Be baptized FOR THE REMISSION OF YOUR
SINS- (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans
6:3-4).
6. Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

the opposite of that. Meekness is controlled strength. Jesus was still meek and lowly in heart when He drove the money changers out of the temple. Moses was still meek when he approached Pharaoh demanding that his people be let go. So many preachers believe that unity demands weakness, compromise, and flattery; this is the thinking that leads to churches of men, rather than churches of Christ. One preacher put it this way:

We have preachers today who can tiptoe through a totally dark room at the midnight hour—eggs all over the floor—tiptoe so carefully they will not step on a single egg! They are experts in “not” breaking eggs. We need some strong preachers that will send the shells flying in every direction. Some real mashing needs to be done. We are in the big mess that we are in today because of this tiptoe, watered-down, stand-for-nothing preaching. And such an attempt not to preach the strong news of the gospel is equal to no preaching at all. (Bobby Liddell in *Studies in Ephesians*, 1997 Editor Dub McClish. Comment attributed to Foy Smith).

The third and fourth qualifications that will lead to unity are long-suffering and forbearing. The thought here is one of patience, forbearance, just what it says, suffering long. Why do we overlook some of the quirks, and personality differences in our family? Simply because we love them. We are not talking about sinful activities, but things that might annoy non-members of our family, we are able to overlook out of love. Christians know that nobody is perfect, and that even brothers and sisters in Christ can annoy one another from time-to-time. But we must have the ability to be longsuffering and forbear one another because we have a bond of love established on the love of our Savior.

The last qualification that must be met before unity can be established is the word found in verse 3, *endeavouring*. To endeavor means to put forth much effort, to exert one's self, give diligence. Unity takes work! It is not easy always to be humble, meek, longsuffering, and forbearing. But if we work to love one another and get along, we can do it!

One last thing that must be understood regarding unity is that individual Christians do not have to agree on everything in order for

unity to be maintained. For example, I do not agree with my wife on everything, nor does she agree with me on every subject this does not mean that we do not have a good marriage- There are certain matters, however, on which we **MUST** agree, or our marriage is doomed. So too, there is a “basis” for unity, outlined in Ephesians 4:4-6, that must be agreed upon. When these seven items are not understood or followed, unity cannot be present. The first of the seven propositions for unity is that there is one body (Ephesians 4:4).

The one body is the body of Christ, the church. “And hath put all things under his [Jesus, MER] feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22,23). The church is the body of saved believers throughout the world, of which Christ is the head. There are many members of this one body (1 Corinthians 12:20), yet there is only one body, and Christ is the one Head (Colossians 1:18). This one body is the church He promised to build (Matthew 16:18). He did build it, just as promised, establishing it on Pentecost (Acts 2). And it is to this one body that Jesus adds all the saved (Acts 2:47).

In view of the hundreds of different churches in existence today, it is natural to ask, “Which church is the church in which are the saved?” Bobby Liddell wrote this concerning the one body:

All of the saved—not just some, or most, or even almost all, but all—are in the one church. This being so, no accountable saved person is saved outside the one church. Every saved person is a person who has been added to His (Christ’s) church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). No unsaved person has been added. No one not added to the church has been saved. No saved person has been added by the Lord to any other church than His. None can, from the New Testament of Christ overturn the absolute identity of His church with those who are saved and who have lived since the cross.

There is only one church, established by its one Head, Jesus Christ, and it was established nearly two-thousand years ago in Jerusalem. One cannot find, in the New Testament, the authority of any of the denominations/manmade churches. Why would one ever want to be in a church which cannot be the one body that the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Paul, made a condition for unity and yes, even salvation?

A Body Without A Head for 16 Days?

By Mark Reynolds

By now I am sure that everyone has heard about the death of the Pope, the head of the Catholic Church, on April 2, 2005. I am also sure that nearly everyone is aware that the Cardinals of the Church met on April 18, 2005 to elect a new Pope. Let’s think about this for just a moment. Paul, by inspiration wrote, “And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church..,” (Colossians 1:18). To put it plainly, we learn from this text and others, that Jesus is the Head, and the church is the body. There is no more room for another head over the church, as there is room for another head on top of my physical body. Could you imagine the looks I would get if I walked around town with two heads on my body?!?

As many shocked looks as I would get if I walked around town with two heads, I imagine that I would get just as many if I walked around town with no head at all. Yet, that is what the Catholic Church did for 16 days! Two heads, or no head, a physical body would be a monstrosity. So too is a Church that tries, to promote one to be equal with Christ as head of His church, making two heads on one body, a monstrosity in the eyes of Almighty.

Because the Catholic Church perverted God’s pattern for leadership in the church, set forth in the New Testament they have been a body walking around with no head for sixteen days. If I did not know anything about religion, except that, I would know that a church without a head, could not possibly be the one body (church) we read about in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:4).

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God is the final judge of all human beings. The apostle Paul speaks of the “day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16). We will someday stand face-to-face with God and answer for how we have chosen to live. It is sobering to think of giving account to “God the Judge of all” (Hebrews 12:23).

It is tragic to replace the one true God with trivial ones of our own making. What God are you serving? Have you devoted your life to the accumulation of things and money to the point they have become your god? Are these first in your life? The apostle Paul said such is “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5). Things and money make a shoddy imitation of a god. They lack the eternal nature of the true God. They can last no longer than the world, and then they are gone. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal” (Matthew 6:19). Clinging to this “god” is futile. What good will it do you at the end? The best it can do is pay for a nice funeral, but that will be small consolation when you stand before the true God, having ignored him.

The same thing is true of whatever “god” you choose to worship and serve. It lacks the power and eternal existence of the true God. Only when we place our faith and confidence in Him will we be prepared for life here and hereafter. How tragic it will be to stand before “the Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25) and then realize that you have not served him “with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12:30). Instead you have served one of the false gods of this world—money, pleasure, power, etc. There you will stand, facing the ultimate judge, and realize that you have nothing to offer him. That “god” you have served so diligently is gone, and cannot help you now. You are alone with the only God that ever really existed. And you are without hope!

There is only one God. That is all there has ever been, in spite of man’s sad attempts at substitutes. Are you prepared to meet him someday?

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Why are there so many denominations in our world today, teaching different doctrines? Because men have failed to recognize the first of the propositions for unity—that there is one, and only one, body. All are invited into the one body, purchased by Christ with His own blood (Acts 20:28); Jews, Gentiles, man, woman—all are welcome. But they must come to Christ on His terms. When I am baptized into Christ He adds me to His one body, His church (Acts 2:41-47). On this subject, there is no room for compromise. Are you a member of His one body, written of and described in the New Testament?

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God’s Plan for Unity—One Spirit

By Jim Bullington

The force of the “one” phrases in Ephesians 4:4-6 is such that they could just as accurately be rendered with the word “only” preceding each of the seven “ones” and the nouns which they modify. It does no violence to the text to translate it as “only one body,” “only one Spirit,” “only one hope,” “only one Lord,” “only one faith,” “only one baptism,” and “only one God.” This is the obvious import of each of these expressions.

To say that there is only one Spirit is to affirm His constancy and consistency. He is not a will-o-the-wisp being that has no absolutes of character, He, like each member of the godhead, is absolute with not a hint of arbitrariness, His purposes and methods are as constant as those of the Father and the Son. Perhaps our concept of the Spirit has been colored by our cultural view of spirits rather than allow the Bible to declare what He is like and His role in man’s redemption and sanctification. This article will present some of the absolutes of the Holy Spirit and how His work facilitates the “unity of the Spirit” anticipated by Ephesians 4:3.

First, let’s consider the concept of unity. Many people find it strange that biblical unity is not a mandate; rather, unity is a condition that results from following other mandates. If unity were a mandate, the lack of unity would, regardless of circumstance, be sinful; such simply

is not the case. God expects believers to be separate from the world (2 Corinthians 6:17). He also expects faithful believers to withdraw themselves from and even mark those who cause dissension in the body of Christ (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14 and Romans 16:17). So the condition of unity is a desirable condition but it is only possible as men and women align their lives with the doctrine of God.

The Spirit reveals absolute truth. This role of revealer of truth was one which Jesus identified with His apostles on the night of His betrayal. Consider some of what He had to say about the Spirit. “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:12-13).

The Spirit absolutely will not contradict Himself or other members of the godhead. The Spirit is God and God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Sharing the divine attributes, the Spirit has no variableness or shadow of turning” (James 1:17). Since the Holy Spirit is the sole source of spiritual truths to be revealed to man it follows that His word can be trusted when it comes to such matters. Paul recognized this fact when He wrote, “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Spirit absolutely deals with humanity in general through the written word. The promise of the abiding Spirit as a direct revealer of truth was to the apostles and not to humanity in general. While it is true that God could have chosen to reveal Himself directly to humanity, that is not what He did; rather, He chose to reveal Himself to the Holy apostles and prophets and they, in turn, revealed Him to humanity through their spoken and written word. Again, you are asked to consider the writings of Paul: “[H]ow that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the

In reality, we are no better than the idolaters of the ancient world. We may be a little more sophisticated in the way we worship our “gods”, but we are no closer to understanding and knowing the true God than they were.

“In the beginning God...” (Genesis 1:1) The Bible begins with God and assumes his existence. This is the first of approximately ten thousand references to Him in the Bible. That is an average of about ten times in every chapter. With such a detailed revelation of Him, we have no excuse for being ignorant of Him.

The Bible says that God is all-powerful. He is capable of doing anything that can be done. “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God” (Psalm 62:11). “Great is our Lord, and of great power” (Psalm 147:5). He is the one who spoke and the universe existed, simply because He willed it to be so. He is the one who will someday bring the world crashing down into oblivion when it is time to do so. “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed” (Psalm 102:25-26). How dare we try to make the all-powerful God subservient to our wants and wishes!

God is eternal. There was never a time when He was not, and will never be a time when He will not be. He had no beginning, and will have no end. “I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations...thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:24, 27). God is the original cause behind everything that exists. He was here before he formed the worlds, and he will be here when they have been burned into non-existence.

God is all-present. There is no place that He is not The Psalmist spoke of this: Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:6-10).

There Is One God

By Phil Grear

Ashteroth. Baal. Molech. Chemosh. Dagon. Jupiter. Diana. Mercury. Hermes. Castor. Pollux. These are only some of the false gods listed in the Bible as worshipped by men and societies that did not know God.

The mythology of these “gods” points to man’s original knowledge of the true God. Many sociologists and anthropologists argue that man’s religious faith evolved from “polytheism” (the belief in many gods) to “monotheism” (the belief in one God). But in reality it went the other way. Man’s religious faith devolved from monotheism to polytheism. No society exists without some “god”. Even atheistic, communistic societies merely replace God with the religion of the state. Their religious devotion and fervor is directed toward their dictator, instead of Jehovah.

America, sadly, is as idolatrous as any nation that has ever existed. True, few of us actually worship stone, wood, or metal statues, but then few of us actually worship the true God, either. We have replaced him with the gods of money, power, popularity, recreation, and comfort. We have elevated ourselves to the position of “god”. We have placed ourselves at the pinnacle of importance, and boasted of our own ability to provide everything we need. We have made gods out of scientists, a religion out of science, and worshipped at the altar of own intelligence. We have “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

It is amazing how little genuine understanding we have of the true God. We trivialize him by attempting to make him subservient to us. We have relegated him to a position where he must do our bidding when we tell him to do it. We deny his right to judge us. We need not answer to him. He must allow us to live as we please, and then be there to fix things for us when they go wrong. He must answer our prayers exactly as we think he should. We owe him nothing, and he owes us everything. We need not be impressed with him, but believe he should be impressed with us. We even feel perfectly comfortable using his name as nothing more than by-word or curse word.

sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 3:3-5). Notice that the understanding that Paul received through the Spirit was available to any and all who cared to read what he wrote.

The Spirit absolutely completed His work of revelation in the first century. That Spiritual gifts were associated with the revelation of truth is undeniable (see Mark 16:17-19, Hebrews 2:1-4, and 1 Corinthians 12-14). However, it is also undeniable that both Jesus and the Spirit said that His work of revelation would cease. Since His work was primarily that of revelation, it follows that that work ceased when revelation was completed. Paul anticipated that day when he wrote, “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). That which was in part was the spiritual gifts and that which was perfect was to be the completed word of God. Jude confirmed this work was complete when he instructed his readers to “...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The only plausible alternative to this position is to admit that revelation has not ceased. In that case we all need three ring loose-leaf binders for Bibles rather than the bound editions that are so common today!

The Spirit absolutely wants all men to “speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11). This admonition has the force of a Divine mandate! How foolish it would have been for the Spirit to inspire Peter to challenge all men to speak in accordance with God’s word (His oracles) if man could not understand the word of God. However, not only can man understand God’s word, man can order his speech such that it is in perfect alignment with that word. When man speaks “as the oracles” of God, the basis for unity is laid upon an unshifting foundation. Man’s tastes may vary with time and circumstance, but the word of God is incorruptible and eternal (1 Peter 1:23).

As a concluding point, please know that the Spirit wants all men to be saved. This was the express reason for Jesus’ coming to earth (Luke 19:10), and it was also the express will of the Father (1 Timothy 2:4). The Spirit certainly does not will one thing concerning the salvation of

men while the Father and the Son will something else! When men wait for the Spirit to move them to obedience apart from that which is written, they wait for that which God has not promised. He has done everything necessary to effect the salvation of every human being now living! If it is your will to adopt the Holy Spirit's will as your own, the first step is to submit to believer's baptism just as about 3000 people did when the Spirit first revealed the Gospel of our risen Lord (Acts 2:37-40). Furthermore, walking in the light of God's word will guarantee continual unity (fellowship) with God and with all other faithful Christians.

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There Is One Hope

By Larry Reynolds

The author of the book of Ephesians is the apostle Paul (Ephesians 1:1). The book is one of Paul's four prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon). These four epistles have been called the anatomy of Christianity or the anatomy of the church. Ephesians is about the body of believers who are called the church, of which Christ is the head. Colossians directs our attention to the head of the body — Christ. He is the center of the circle around which all Christian living revolves. The book of Philippians is about the church walking here on earth. Christian living is the theme. The book of Philemon is Christianity in action. These together are the whole of Christianity.

Our study is taken from Ephesians chapter four. This chapter contains the divine platform for Christian unity. There is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. Our lesson will focus on the one hope of the Christian. We will discuss the following subjects — how we know we have the one hope; why we have the one hope; where is the one hope.

True Christian unity can be obtained when we all determine to be united in our obedience to the precepts of God's revealed will. This is not to say that baptism is the only area in which our practice should find agreement with others who are attempting to follow the Savior. Truly, baptism is a synecdoche for complete obedience to the faith. If we are to be united in Christ, then we must stand united in teaching AND practice. How fitting that baptism in this context represents complete and total obedience to the word of God. By hearing the word of God, believing that word, making the decision to abandon a life of sin in favor of service to God, and confessing faith in Jesus as the Son of God, one is then ready to complete his initial obedience to the commands of God by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of his sins. This culminating act of obedience changes the relationship between him who obeys and God: before baptism, he was outside of Christ, and without God as his father; but by his submission to the command of baptism he is now in Christ (Galatians 3:27), having been born anew into the kingdom of God (John 3:3,5). Baptism thus becomes God's dividing line. It divides the alien sinner from the child of God. It divides the unbeliever from the believer. It divides the disobedient from the obedient. Those who are convinced of the truthfulness of these matters will act immediately in accordance with them. Then, and only then, can we be truly united in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins? If not, then you have not come to know the saving power of the blood of Christ. Your sins are ever before you, and continue to separate you from a loving and merciful God. Our Lord gave his life that we might live. Will you not obey his will and be buried with him in the likeness of his death, to be raised in the likeness of his resurrection to life anew? Baptism, preceded by and built upon faith, repentance and confession, will save your soul (1 Peter 3:21). By rendering obedience to God's will in this matter, you will be united with the Lord, and with all others who have put on Christ in baptism. You will be added by the Lord to HIS church, partaking in the fellowship of the saints. Will you not, friend, help us as we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?

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the baptism of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). Of these seven, which one did Paul have in mind when he states emphatically to the Ephesians, and by implication to all of us, that there is but one baptism? By process of elimination, we can easily determine the one baptism that is in force for the child of God today. We can immediately dismiss the baptism unto Moses, for this has reference to the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites many years prior to the time of Paul's writing the book of Ephesians. The baptism of the dead may have reference to an attempt by some in Corinth, due to a gross misunderstanding of the design and purpose of baptism, to gain some benefit for their dead loved ones by being baptized in their stead. Certainly this is not the one baptism that Paul has in mind. The baptism of fire is a reference to future punishment for those who disobey the Lord's commands. Again, we can dismiss this idea as the one baptism to be enjoined upon all of God's children. The baptism of suffering was a promise made to the apostles of our Lord, a fate which awaited them for their faithful service to the King of kings. Yet again, this cannot be the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 due to the limited scope of this promise. John's baptism was superseded by the baptism of the Great Commission, its efficacy limited to those who obeyed it before the cross (see Acts 19:1-7). We can clearly see that this is not the one baptism in effect at the time of Paul's writing, John's baptism having been abrogated by the death of Christ upon His cross. So then, we are left with only two possibilities for the one baptism—the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or the baptism of the Great Commission. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was limited in scope and design. It was a promise made to the apostles of Jesus (John 16:13) which finds fulfillment in the events of Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection and ascension into heaven (Acts 2:1-4). Note that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise made to a particular group, and is never commanded of anyone in the New Testament. With these considerations in mind, the one baptism in the text before us cannot be the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This leaves only one plausible answer: the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5 is the baptism of the Great Commission. This baptism is commanded of all who hear and believe the Gospel (Mark 16:16). It is a burial (Romans 6:3-4) in water (Acts 8:36-38) for the remission, or forgiveness, of past sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The baptism that Paul enjoins upon all is the process by which God adds one to the church (Acts 2:47).

How We Know We Have The One Hope?

The one God has revealed to us through His inspired word that He has prepared a special place for the faithful: "But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:16). The reason it is referred to as hope is because we have not seen it yet with our physical eyes. Paul expresses this truth in his letter to the Romans. "For we are saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:24,25). The reason we eagerly wait is because of the evidence that God has given us in His revealed word. Listen carefully to what God promised to His faithful. "In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior" (Titus 1:2,3). The Bible reveals that one hope is only found in Christ. Some thirty five times in the book of Ephesians the phrase "in Christ" is used to show all of God's spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). In the second chapter in verses 11-13 He reveals that the Gentiles were lost without hope because they were not "in Christ," but since Christ came and shed His blood they now had hope.

We can know for sure we have the one hope if we are in Christ. When we have faith in God and submit to His will and are baptized into Christ, then we are in Christ. Listen carefully to what Paul told the Galatians. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26,27). If a person is not "in Christ" then that person has no hope.

Why Do We Have The One Hope?

The reason we have this hope is because God made a promise long ago that He would give His children eternal rest. "Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which is it impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the

hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast and which enters the Presence behind the veil” (Hebrews 6:17,19). He demonstrated that He would keep His promise when He raised His Son from the dead. Jesus came to this earth to die for our sins (Matthew 20:29; Luke 19:10). He was raised the third day and won the victory over death. “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:55-57). Because of that victory the faithful child of God has the hope of heaven. Just as sure as Christ was raised from the dead, the Christian will rise from the dead to go his eternal home. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (I Peter 1:3,4). We are indebted to the great mercy and power of our God.

Where Is The One Hope?

When Jesus was about to die and leave this world, He made a promise to the apostles that He would go and prepare a place for them. He then told them that He would return to take them to the prepared place (John 14:1-4). We know that He was raised from the dead and after a short period of time ascended to heaven to sit at His Father’s side. When the Lord ascended to heaven the apostles watched as the clouds received Him out their sight. While they were watching two men in white apparel said, “Men of Galilee why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Christ will descend from heaven to take His faithful children to the place He has prepared. The apostle Paul has spoken about it in this way. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming” (I Thessalonians 2:17)? The one hope of the Christian is to be raised to meet the Lord in the air and thus be with Him always in the eternal home prepared by Him.

There Is One Baptism

Patrick Morrison

With some 2500+ religious bodies in our nation, one can hardly say that “Christianity” is united. Many have been the attempts to unite those who profess belief in Jesus as the Son of God. Unity summits and forums have been devised and held trying to “unite” those who claim allegiance to the Savior. However, these attempts have failed, and that miserably, for such attempts at unity are based upon faulty standards and practices, upon wrongful authority and with an improper view of what the church really is. The purveyors of such fail to realize that in bypassing the word of God while attempting to bring unity is simply an exercise in futility. Merely forging a conglomeration of denominations is not at all what our Lord had in mind when he prayed for unity of believers (John 17:17-23). Denominationalism stands completely opposed to Christian unity. Until men resolve to abandon the devil’s concept of unity and forsake the denominations, embracing pure and simple New Testament Christianity, there can be no true unity. Most assuredly, if the Lord prayed for those who would believe on him through the word of the apostles, and if we are commanded as his followers to be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10), then we can be fully confident that our Lord and his faithful apostles provided the means whereby we can achieve unity. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides us with a platform upon which true unity can be built. The seven ones of Ephesians 4:4-6 encapsulate those things which are absolutely necessary for Christian unity to obtain. Herein we find the unity of fellowship (“one body”), the unity of revelation (“one Spirit”), the unity of expectation (“one hope”), the unity of authority (“one Lord”), the unity of teaching (“one faith”), the unity of practice (“one baptism”), and the unity of (“one God”). God’s children can be united, provided all are willing to submit to the one true standard of authority, teaching and practice—the perfect will of God.

It is our design to notice the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5. There are seven baptisms mentioned in the New Testament: John’s baptism (Mark 1:4); the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11); the baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11); the baptism of suffering (Mark 10:38-39); the baptism unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea (1 Corinthians 10:2); baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29); and

have contradictory doctrines. Paul addressed this sin by saying, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius" (1 Corinthians 1:10-14).

Additionally, all of these writings came about long after the completion of the New Testament and God's revelation of the one faith to man. There is but one system of salvation and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:16-17). The one faith that Jude declared to be fully revealed once and for all in the first century (Jude 3), is the gospel plan of salvation. The gospel is the means by which God makes a sinner righteous. The gospel is the system of faith that God uses to save the lost, and there are not many from which to choose. The faith, the one faith, the true faith is revealed in the New Testament and can be found nowhere else.

May I plead with you, if you belong to a church, religion or group that has a creed book or declaration of faith, leave now. Turn to the one faith that is revealed in the New Testament. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Only then can we, "...all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). Only then can we, "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Brandon Britton may be reached at PO Box 329, Pulaski, TN. 38478.

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There Is One Lord

By A.J Cox

Paul's Ephesian letter affirms that true religious unity (the unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17:20, 21) may only be enjoyed in the body of Christ Christ's power to unify is illustrated by the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles in one body. By His death, Jesus removed the barrier which had for centuries divided Jews and Gentiles, and of the two made one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:11-16). Only the Lord could unite those who were so different from one another. Only the church could provide the environment in which peace could exist between those who previously had been so antagonistic one to another. When Jesus adds a baptized believer to His church He effectively unites that obedient believer with every other child of God (Acts 2:41-47).

Once in the body, every Christian is obligated to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). In other words, the church is charged with maintaining the unity which the Lord initiated. In order for the saints to maintain unity there must be a platform, or a basis for that Unity. Obviously without a Divine standard men would have very little hope of achieving or maintaining unity because each person would have his own ideas as to what should serve as the grounds for religious unity. With Divine guidance, however, a uniform standard can be provided upon which Christians can unite. To this end Paul relates God's perfect plan for unity in the Seven Ones of Ephesians 4:4-6. One of the planks of this Divine platform for unity is that there is "One Lord" (Ephesians 4:5).

The Meaning of the Word "Lord"

The Greek word which is translated "Lord" in Ephesians 4:5 is the word *kurios*. *Kurios* is defined as "he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord" (Thayer, p. 365). It is a title of honor, expressive of respect and

reverence, with which servants salute their masters. In addition to “lord,” this term is also rendered “master” (Matthew 6:24; Mark 13:35; Romans 14:4; Ephesians 6:9), and “sir” (Matthew 13:27; John 4:11; Revelation 7:14) in the King James Version. The word *kurios* was employed by servants in addressing their masters (Matthew 13:27; Matthew 25:20, 22), by the disciples in addressing Jesus (Matthew 8:25), by sons in addressing their fathers (Matthew 21:30), by wives in addressing their husbands (1 Peter 3:6), by citizens in addressing magistrates and kings (Matthew 27:63; Acts 25:26), and by anyone who desired to honor a man of distinction.

To say, then, in the context of preserving religious unity in the body of Christ that there is “One Lord,” is to say that unity in the church is conditioned, in part, upon its members all recognizing a common master. But who, in the context of Ephesians 4:4-6, are we to understand this common master to be?

Jesus Christ is the One Lord

God the Father is certainly the Lord (Luke 1:32; Jude 4). The context of Ephesians 4:4-6, however, demands that we understand the “One Lord” to be Jesus Christ. The Father is specified in Ephesians 4:6. With the addition of the Spirit in Ephesians 4:4 it becomes evident that the Godhead occupies three of the seven planks of this platform for unity. All Christians, therefore, must recognize and submit to Jesus as their master in order for unity to prevail in the body of Christ Jesus has earned the title and distinction of “Lord” by virtue of his death and resurrection (Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:8-11). Before His ascension Jesus declared “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). To this the apostle Peter similarly testifies in Acts 2:36 when he declared that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ. What does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord and Christ? Peter explained it in Acts 2:29-35 as God raising up the Son to sit on His throne at the right hand of God. The Lord Jesus will continue to exercise that authority until the last enemy is destroyed, which is death, at which time Jesus will deliver the kingdom to the Father and put down all rule, and all authority, and power (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). But until that time, which is as long as the world stands, Jesus will continue to be the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings; and Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:14, 15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16;

The word faith can be used in reference to my personal faith/belief. Examples of the word being used in this way would include, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17); “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seem him” (Hebrews 11:6); “And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee” (Luke 18:42).

The word faith can also be used in reference to the system of faith, the gospel, God’s system of redeeming many from his sins. The most common occurrences of faith being used in this way come from the book of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews. The word translated faith is “pistis”, which is defined, “conviction of the truth of anything, belief; the religious beliefs of Christians.” The only way to determine if it refers to my personal belief or the system of faith is by context. Our focus for this article is “the one faith” (Ephesians 4:5), which is an obvious reference to the system of faith.

The expression “the faith” is found forty-two times in the King James Version. In Acts 6:7 we learn that many priests were obedient to the faith. Elymas the sorcerer sought to turn the deputy away from the faith (Acts 13:8). The apostle Paul urged the Christians in various cities to continue in The faith (Acts 14:22). At one time Paul persecuted the faith, but now he was preaching it (Galatians 1:23). He also had a son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2). He warned that some would depart from (1 Timothy 4:1), deny (1 Timothy 5:8) and go astray from the faith (1 Timothy 6:10). We also learn that this system of faith was delivered once and for all in the first century (Jude 3).

How does this relate to the statement from Ephesians 4:5 that there is but one faith? Contrary to what is the prevailing thought of our time, God does not approve the countless conflicting doctrines and commandments of men that plague what is called Christianity. There are not many roads leading to heaven as some false teachers claim. To worship God while being obedient to the doctrines of men is in vain (Matthew 15:9). Most all denominational churches in existence today have their own unique beliefs and practices. Many have creed books, catechisms, professions of faith, books of discipline and many other teachings which originate with man. All claim to be Christians and to follow the Bible, yet they all teach something different and

Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape...If ye had known me, ye should have known my father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him...Jesus saith unto him...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" (John 5:37; 14:7,9). "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 John 2:3). I have never seen heaven with my own eyes, but I believe in this glorious place because Jesus is an eyewitness to heaven's glory and He left us His testimony. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:1-6). This is how a jury reaches a verdict in a criminal court case. The jurors were not eyewitnesses to the crime. They did not see what happened, but they listen to the testimony of witnesses. They consider the evidence and then decide whether they believe the plaintiff or defendant. I believe in God and spiritual things because of the evidence that has been presented to me through the Scriptures. Like the invisible force of gravity, I know that God is the invisible force that holds the universe together. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). Like the life giving oxygen we breathe, I know He is the giver and sustainer of my life. "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

It is expected that those in the world would misunderstand Bible faith, but it is totally unacceptable for those in the religious world to be misled or misinformed concerning the word "faith" and how it is used in the Bible. When the word faith is mentioned, most people, even religious people, will automatically assume you are referring to belief. Granted, the word "faith" is frequently used in the Bible as a reference to personal belief or mental assessment that something is true. However, the diligent Bible student is aware that the word can be used to refer to something else.

Acts 10:36). And until that time all who desire unity in the body must bow the knee to Him who is the head of the body, King Jesus (Ephesians 1:20-23; 5:23-24).

Submission to Christ

One of the saddest statements to be found in the Bible is Judges 21:25. In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." What do you suppose would be the state of affairs in America if there was no authority, or law, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes? Obviously chaos and discord would reign. In order for there to be peace and unity in the land there must be law, and there must be submission to that law. Lawlessness breeds anarchy, not unity. Likewise, if there is to be peace and unity in the church, there must be law, and there must be submission to that law.

Just as Israel of old was governed by God's covenant, the Israel of God today, the church, is governed by God's covenant Whereas the former covenant was the Law of Moses, the latter is the gospel of Christ which is a better covenant established upon better promises. (Hebrews 8:6-13). Jesus indicated that it was not enough to simply call Him Lord, it is only when one submits to His will that He is truly that person's Lord and Master. Christ said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21). When a person has truly made Jesus their Lord they are not doing what is right in their own eyes, they are doing what is right in the eyes of their Master. This is why there can be no unity between the church and the denominations. Their good intentions and sincerity not withstanding, sectarians are not doing the things which the Lord has said. If they were submitting to Christ they would not be sectarians but Christians. If, they were obeying the will of Christ they would not be in a denomination but in the church. This is why the unity for which Jesus prayed continues to elude them.

Conclusion

If the church is to be unified its members must humbly submit to the Lord's benevolent rule. There is a king in the Israel of God today, and as long as Christians do that which is right in His eyes, and not their

own, peace and harmony will prevail in the body of Christ May you, with God's perfect plan, endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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There Is One Faith

By Brandon Britton

To be such a frequently used term in the Bible, the word "faith" is far too often misunderstood. This is especially true of those in the world who view "faith" as a crutch for the weak who cannot cope with reality. To the world faith is foolish and useless. In the eyes of the world those who profess faith in God or spiritual things are no different than those who believe in UFO's, Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster. This misconception comes as a result of confusing "blind faith" with "Bible faith." The faith that is taught in the Bible is not "blind faith", but belief that is based upon evidence. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Did you notice that the Bible clearly states that faith is based upon the evidence of things not seen? Have you ever SEEN gravity? Have you ever SEEN oxygen? Have you ever SEEN your own brain or heart? Why is it that we believe (have faith) in all of these things, yet we have never seen them? The answer is simple: evidence. I believe in gravity, though I've never seen it, because I have seen an apple fall from a tree to the ground. Gravity is the invisible force that holds this world together. I believe in oxygen, though I've never seen it, because I can take a deep breath and feel it fill my lungs. Oxygen is an invisible element that sustains my life. I believe my heart and brain exist, though I've never seen them, because I can feel it beat in my chest and I am alive. My heart and my brain give me life and allow me to function and exist. I also believe in God, though I have never seen Him, because I can see the work of His Creative hands. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). I KNOW God because He has revealed (introduced) Himself to me through His Word spoken by His Son. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (Hebrews 1:1). "And the

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