

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 23, 2025 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## T H E B O O K O F EPHESIANS *How to live the Christian life*

**EPHESIANS: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – PART 24**  
*“The Basis of Christian Unity” - Ephesians 4:4-6*

*“<sup>1</sup> I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, <sup>2</sup>with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” - Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKJV)*

*“<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” – Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)*

### KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EPHESIANS

To gain a better understanding of the Book of Ephesians, consider the following background information:

1. **Authorship:** The Apostle Paul - Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul.
2. **Date of Writing:** A.D. 60-63 - Likely written around A.D. 60-63 during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
3. **Place of writing:** Rome – Paul wrote the book/letter of Ephesians from a Roman prison
4. **Audience:** Ephesian Christians at Ephesus and surrounding area Addressed to the Christian community in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor. Ephesians is considered a “circular letter” meant to be circulated to church in the area of Ephesus... possibly the same 7 churches

5. **Purpose: How to live the Christian life** To strengthen the faith of believers and address issues of unity and spiritual maturity.
  6. **Themes: Grace, the church, and holy living** - Key themes include grace, the church as the body of Christ, and the importance of living a holy life.
  7. **Structure: Ephesus is divided into two main sections** - Divided into two main sections: doctrinal teachings (chapters 1-3) and practical applications (chapters 4-6).
  8. **Cultural Context: Ephesus was center of commerce and religion** - Ephesus was a center of commerce and religion, known for the Temple of Artemis.
  9. **Significance: Mystery of the gospel and inclusion of Gentiles** - Emphasizes the mystery of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan.
  10. **Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians' emphasis on the spiritual battle** Concludes with a call to spiritual readiness and the armor of God (chapter 6).
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If you want to know what matters most to someone, listen to their last words. Jesus shared his most intimate words in the upper room discourse in John 13-17. Those five chapters are packed with powerful spiritual truths. Two in particular stand out: How much God loves us and how we should love one another. Over and over, Jesus comes back to these truths and ties them together. He says, *"This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you"* (John 15:12 NLT). And as he prepared to die, his primary concern was that his followers would be unified. The following 12 statements, made by Jesus, Paul, and other New Testament writers, summarize the Bible's message about unity.

### **Why Unity Should Matter to Christians?**

- (1) **John 13:34-35 = Unity proves we're saved** – *"<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* You don't prove your salvation by having a Christian bumper sticker on your car. You prove it by how you love other believers. ***Do saved people always act in unity? Why or why not?***
- (2) **John 17:11 = The Trinity is our model for unity** – *"<sup>11</sup> Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."* The Bible tells us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in perfect harmony with one another. They are three in one and provide a picture of our unity as Christians. ***How does the Trinity model our unity?***
- (3) **John 17:21 = Jesus' last prayer is that we'd live in unity** – *"<sup>21</sup> (I pray) that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."* Jesus' vision is that anyone who claims the name of Christ should have unity with other believers. In fact, John 17:21 tells us that our unity will lead to others placing their trust in Jesus. ***If when we are in unity we are answering God's prayer for us... if we are living in disunity what are is our life saying?***

- (4) **John 17:22 = God gives us His glory, so we'll be unified** – *“<sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.”* The purpose of God's presence in your life isn't to make you more opinionated and stubborn. It's to make you more loving. For the sake of unity, he gives his power and presence to anyone who lays aside secondary differences with other believers. ***What does God's glory have to do with us our being unified?***
- (5) **John 17:23 = Our unity is our greatest witness to unbelievers** – *“<sup>23</sup> I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”* ***The world won't be won until we are as Christians are one! How and why does our unity bear witness to unbelievers? Why is the our “greater witness?”***
- (6) **Acts 4:31 = Unity removes fear and creates boldness** – *“<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”* A unified church gives all of us more power and courage. Division creates fear, but unity removes it. ***How does unity get rid of fear and create boldness?***
- (7) **Acts 4:32 = When a church is truly unified, everybody's needs are met** – *“<sup>32</sup> Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.”* The early church proved that when all believers are “united in heart and mind”(Acts 4:32 NLT), people share what they have with others—and needs are met. ***Is this a true statement, “when a church is unified everybody's needs are met? Why might this be true? Why might this not be true? Why might be wrong with this statement?***
- (8) **1 Corinthians 12:12-13 & 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 = Baptism and communion are visible signs of unity** - 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 says, *“<sup>12</sup> For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”* And in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 we read, *“<sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”* Both baptism and communion are visual representations of the truth that we not only belong to Jesus but to one another as well. When we're baptized, we're laying aside our differences of race, nationality, and background to accept our common identity in Christ. Our unity is so important to the Lord's Supper that the Bible tells us not to partake of it if we're not unified. ***In what way is Baptism and Communion visible signs of unity?***
- (9) **1 Corinthians 1:10 = Focusing on our common purpose creates unity** – *“<sup>10</sup> Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”* Paul urges Christians not to be program-driven, pressure-driven, power-driven, pleasure-driven, or politically driven.

Instead, he tells us to be purpose-driven. We're more united when we work together for a common purpose. *What is our "common purpose" and how does that create unity?*

(10) 1 Corinthians 12:26-27 = Unity begins when we realize we're incomplete without each other – *"<sup>26</sup> And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."* God wired us to need each other. No one has all the skills and talents. He uniquely shaped us to make a contribution in this world. Unity begins when we realize we're incomplete on our own. *In what ways are we incomplete without one another?*

(11) Ephesians 2:16 = Jesus died to unite us, not divide us (Ephesians 2:16) – *"<sup>16</sup> And that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."* You won't find a place for bigotry or preferred treatment at the foot of the cross. When Jesus reconciled us, he brought us all together, ending our hostility toward one another. *How does Jesus' death unite us?*

(12) Ephesians 4:3 = Jesus expects me to work hard at unifying Christians – *"<sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* God's Word directly tells us to *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit"* (Ephesians 4:3 NIV). One day we'll stand before God, and he'll ask us if we made "every effort" to unite with other believers. I'm heartbroken that Christians aren't typically known for their love for one another. *If you took a survey and asked 1,000 people, "What comes to mind when someone mentions a born-again Christian?" few would say "their love for one another."* But that's what Jesus wants us to be known for. It's what he prayed for as he prepared to die on the cross for us. If it was so important to Jesus, I think it should be important to us. *Why do we think we have to "work hard" at unity?*

The subject of unity among professing Christians is a difficult issue for conscientious pastors. From time to time I have been asked why I do not promote and lead the church to participate in some of the ecumenical events in town. I have also heard via the grapevine that I am labeled something of a separatist because I do not join in most of these events. I assure you that it is *not* because I do not care about Christian unity. I am very concerned about unity, but I also am very concerned that those who promote unity often do so with scant concern for sound doctrine. In the heat of the Downgrade Controversy, **C. H. Spurgeon** wrote, *"Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin"* (cited by John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* [Crossway Books], p. 212). I agree!

**I want you to think about this...**

- **Must unity always be the call of the day?**
- **Is it ever right to not be unified or to break unity?**
- **Is it ever right to divide?**
- **Is so, when? In what circumstances? Please explain.**

In the 1990's, evangelical leaders Chuck Colson, Bill Bright, J. I. Packer, and others signed the Evangelicals and Catholics Together document. It called on Protestants to come together with the Catholic Church in the many areas where we agree, setting aside our differences over matters like justification by faith alone. For many years before that, the Billy Graham crusades have worked in cooperation with the Catholic Church.

The popular Promise Keepers movement added pressure in the same direction. At their national pastors' conference in 1996, popular author Max Lucado called on 40,000 pastors in attendance to set aside the labels of Catholic and Protestant and to recognize that we're all sailing on the same ship with Jesus as our captain (tape, "Fan into Flame," copyright Promise Keepers). Before serving communion, Lucado urged the pastors who had ever criticized another "denomination" (he clearly meant the Catholic Church) to find a pastor from that denomination and ask his forgiveness. (Presumably, the way that you could find such a pastor would be by his priestly collar.) If Luther and Calvin had been present, Lucado would have urged them to apologize to the pope!

In addition to these strong forces urging us to set aside doctrinal differences for the sake of unity, we now have the emerging church movement, strongly influenced by the postmodern philosophy that there is no absolute truth, or if there is, we cannot know it with certainty. Thus we are being urged to be tolerant of all that claim to be Christian and even of non-Christian religions. They claim that doctrine is divisive and that those who claim to know the truth are arrogant. Thus for the sake of love and unity, we should set aside our doctrinal convictions and accept one another, without criticizing doctrinal beliefs (see D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* [Zondervan] and John MacArthur, *The Truth War* [Thomas Nelson]).

### **Some Serious Questions for Thought:**

- 1. Since error is always a matter of degree, how can we know when it crosses the line from "serious" into "heresy"? When must we break fellowship with a professing believer?**
- 2. Are there different levels of unity or fellowship? Can we have fellowship on an individual level that might not be advisable on a church level?**
- 3. Which is more important: love or truth? (Yes, this is a trick question!)**
- 4. How can we hold firmly to sound doctrine without falling into the error of spiritual pride and wrongful divisiveness?**

Christian unity isn't always the best option when? It's a question that sadly we must ask ourselves and one that is more necessary than perhaps we think. In order to build unity we

need to know the boundaries of that unity. When is it time to say for the sake of unity enough?

**Some things worth fighting for that may rightly divide:** *(recognize that this is not necessarily an exhaustive list and as stated these things may possible be things that we will divide over because they are worth fighting for)*

- (1) **Doctrinal purity and truth** – The primary orthodox doctrines as taught in Scripture are always true for at all time, for all men, n all places
- (2) **The Word of God** – God’s Word is inerrant, infallible and inspired by God
- (3) **Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture** – Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He is God in the flesh. Was the preincarnate Christ present at creation. He is God and He is the only means which a man may be saved.
- (4) **Salvation Truth** – How a person is saved. Man is saved by grace through faith alone as revealed in Scripture, and by no work of his own, only through Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross
- (5) **What Scripture calls sin** – The constant watering down of Scripture and what Scripture clearly calls sin is often a point of contention today. This one may be a little harder for some because often you will hear that this is up for “interpretation.” But the truth is, Scripture is clear to call sin “sin” and we must be too. This has caused mush confusion in our day and greatly affected the purity of the church and faith. Although it is hard we must not divide over what the Bible clearly calls sin, but if there are those who wish to condone, tolerate or overlook sin that may be a something worth dividing over for the sake of truth and purity in the church.

I hope that this message will help clarify what I believe on this important, practical subject and why I believe it.

The foundation for our text is a verse we ended with last week, Ephesians 4:3..

*“<sup>3</sup>Endeavor(ing) to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>3</sup>endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” -Ephesians 4:3 (NKJV)*

*“<sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” – Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)*

*“<sup>3</sup> Being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” – Ephesians 4:3 (NASB)*

*“<sup>3</sup> Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” – Ephesians 4:3 (ESV)*

*“<sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.” -Ephesians 4:3 (NLT)*

Here Paul exhorts us to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul describes the basis or elements that make up this foundational unity of the Spirit. As we saw last week, this unity already exists. We must be diligent to preserve it.

*“<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” – Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)*

Paul sets forth seven elements that form the biblical basis for unity, all prefaced by the word *one*.

- *Three elements are in verse 4*
- *Three in verse 5*
- *And one in verse 6*

Seven, of course, is the biblical number of perfection. It may be that Paul structured this section in this way to show *“that the unity of the Church is a manifestation of the perfection of the Godhead”* (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* [Baker], p. 49).

These seven elements of Christian unity are arranged around each member of the Trinity.

- *Since Paul has just mentioned the Spirit in 4:3, he begins with the Spirit (4:4)*
- *He moves to the Son (“one Lord,” 4:5)*
- *And ends with “one God and Father” (4:6)*

In verse 6, he repeats “all” four times... *“one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* God is “the Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that Paul’s principle for unity is, *“that we should see ourselves as members of the Church, and see the Church as a reflection on earth of the oneness of the Triune God—Three in One, One in Three....”*

He also points out (*Knowing the Times* [Banner of Truth], p. 134) that the unity Paul is describing is not a question of friendliness or fellowship or doing good together. Rather, *“It is something ... which lifts us up into the realm of the blessed Holy Trinity...!”* So we must always think of unity in this exalted way. True Christian unity isn’t sharing a cup of coffee and discussing football scores! Rather, it is bound up with our common relationship with the Triune God. In our text, Paul is saying,

**KEY THOUGHT: *To preserve Christian unity, we must make sure that we all are founded an grounded on the biblical basis for unity.***

Let’s look at each of these seven elements of Christian unity:

### **7 Elements of Christian Unity in Ephesians 4:4-6:**

- (1) Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one body**
- (2) Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one Spirit**
- (3) Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one hope of your calling**

- (4) **Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one Lord**
- (5) **Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one faith**
- (6) **Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one baptism**
- (7) **Biblical unity is built on the truth that there is one God and Father of all**

*“<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” – Ephesians 4:4-6 (NKJV)*

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE BODY**

*“<sup>4</sup> There is one body...” – Ephesians 4:4*

This is one of Paul’s favorite analogies to describe the church in our passage, but he used various, each very telling, words and concepts to describe the church throughout this letter of Ephesians...

### **Ways Paul Describes the Church in Ephesians:**

- (1) **Church = God’s kingdom and we are fellow citizens (Chapter 2) – *In what ways is the church like a kingdom with us as citizens of that kingdom? (we are to worship and serve Him as King/Lord)* In chapter 2, he refers to it as God’s kingdom of which we are fellow citizens**
- (2) **Church = God’s household and we are family members (Chapter 2) - *In what ways is the church like a household with us as members of the family? (brother and sisters in Christ)* Also in chapter 2 of Ephesians Paul refers to the church as God’s household of which we are family members**
- (3) **Church = God’s Temple and we are His dwelling place (Chapter 2) - *In what ways is the church like a Temple and we are His dwelling place? (His presence dwells here)* And then as God’s temple of which we are His dwelling place in the Spirit.**
- (4) **Church = The bride of Christ (Chapter 5) - *In what ways is the church like and we who are members like the bride? (love)* In chapter 5, he will refer to the church as the bride of Christ.**
- (5) **Church = The body of Christ (Chapter 3) - *In what ways is the church like a body? (unity)* And now in chapter 3 he says that unity is built on the fact that we are one body. It is the body of which Jesus Christ is the head. He has already used this expression twice in this letter and will develop it further (1:23; 2:16; 4:25 5:23-32).**

As you know, your body is an organic unit...

- You can’t cut off a body part and have it function separately from the whole.
- It all has to work together.
- Although the parts are different, each part is necessary for the healthy function of the whole body. (Paul develops this idea in greater detail in 1 Cor. 12:12-31.)

- So although the body has this fundamental unity, it also necessarily has diversity.
- This means that we do not all need to look alike and act alike and do the same things.
- There is room for differing gifts, ministries, and personalities in this one body.
- Also, while a human body is highly organized, it's distinguishing characteristic is that it is living.
- A complex machine is highly organized, but it lacks life.
- The church differs from human organizations in that it has this extra essential of new life from God.
- Each member of the body has experienced the new birth. Once we were dead in our sins, but God in His rich mercy made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:1, 5).
- The Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the one body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), so that we become "members of one another" (Eph. 4:25).

There are some profound implications of this truth of the one body of Christ...

### **3 Implications of the Truth of the One Body of Christ, the Church:**

- (1) **Paul is not referring to the visible church, but rather to the unseen, spiritual body of Christ, composed of all genuine believers in every time and place since the Day of Pentecost - These believers worship in a multitude of local churches, but corporately they and the saints in heaven compose this one spiritual body of Christ. Even though a local church seeks to screen its membership (as we do here), every local church no doubt has some people on the membership rolls who are not members of the one body of Christ, because they have not been born again. So this isn't an organizational unity or a unity based on belonging to the same church or denomination. It is a unity of the Spirit. Stemming from this is a second implication...**
- (2) **True Christian unity is always based on this principle of new life in Christ, not on an organizational basis** - True believers may come together and form organizations for evangelism or missions or other cooperative ministries. But if we form or join with an organization composed of those who profess to know Christ, but deny the gospel or other core Christian truths, we do not have biblical unity. It is not the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17. It is not the unity of the Spirit that Paul talks about here. **Genuine unity exists among all that are born again by God's Spirit.** Whenever you meet someone who has experienced the new birth, you have the basis for genuine fellowship, because you are both members of the one body of Christ. The person may be from a different background or denomination or even from a different country, but when you meet, you sense the unity because you both have been born again. It is unity based on shared life in Christ.
- (3) **If other individuals or other local churches are members of this one body of Christ, we should rejoice when they do well** - There should not be competition or rivalry between members of the one body. If another church preaches the gospel and believes in and teaches God's Word as the truth, and it is growing and healthy, praise the Lord! It would be ludicrous for my kidneys to be jealous of my liver because my liver is healthy!

They're all part of this one body, and so the individual members should rejoice when the other members are doing well. *How do you feel about this one? Do we often feel like we are in competition with other churches? Do we experience feeling of envy, jealousy or begrudging of other church that may be doing better than ours number wise? Why do we feel this way? What is a proper Christ-like response?*

## BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE SPIRIT

*"<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit..." – Ephesians 4:4*

Paul means, of course, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the agent of regeneration or the new birth. In John 3:6-7, Jesus explained to Nicodemus, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"*

It is ironic that although Paul mentions the Holy Spirit as a primary element in Christian unity, believers have often divided over the doctrine of the Holy Spirit...

- Based upon some of the transitional passages in Acts (8, 19), some argue that you must receive the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion, accompanied by speaking in tongues.
- But in Romans 8:9, Paul clearly states, *"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him."*
- In Galatians 3:2, Paul asks, *"Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"*
- It is clear in the context that he is talking about receiving salvation.
- At the moment of salvation, we receive the Holy Spirit.

Christians are also divided over whether we must be baptized with the Spirit subsequent to salvation...

- Some mistakenly use the terms, *"the baptism of the Spirit"* and *"the filling of the Spirit"* interchangeably (sadly, Martyn Lloyd-Jones does this).
- But the terms are distinct in Scripture.
- The Holy Spirit baptizes all believers into the one body of Christ at the moment of conversion (1 Cor. 12:13).
- Subsequently, we must learn to walk by the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).

But in spite of these differences among believers, Paul's point in our text is that true biblical unity rests on the truth that there is one Spirit of God and that He alone imparts the new birth to us.

Jesus said, in John 16:7, *“I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you”* Let me just briefly give some background on this verse. You know that the Greek word translated here as “Helper” is *parakletos*. In its technical form, it has a legal dimension; it refers to one who would be an advocate. In its wider context, it speaks of comfort, of protection, of counsel, and of guidance. Jesus also spoke of the Spirit as the Helper in John 14 and introduced Him as “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 16:13).

I think it best for me to simply say a number of things concerning the identity of this Helper with little embellishment.

### **5 Things to Know and Remember About the Holy Spirit:**

- (1) **The Holy Spirit is a unique person** - First, we need to notice that the Holy Spirit is a unique person and not simply a power or an influence. He is spoken of as “He,” not as “it.” This is a matter of importance because if you listen carefully to people speaking, even within your own congregations you may hear the Holy Spirit referenced in terms of the neuter. You may even catch yourself doing it. If you do, I hope you will bite your tongue immediately. We have to understand that the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, is personal. As a person, He may be grieved (Eph. 4:30), He may be quenched in terms of the exercise of His will (1 Thess. 5:19), and He may be resisted (Acts 7:51).
- (2) **The Holy Spirit is one both with the Father and with the Son** - Second, the Holy Spirit is one both with the Father and with the Son. In theological terms, we say that He is both co-equal and co-eternal. When we read the whole Upper Room Discourse, we discover that it was both the Father and the Son who would send the Spirit (John 14:16; 16:7), and the Spirit came and acted, as it were, for both of Them. So the activity of the Spirit is never given to us in Scripture in isolation from the person and work of Christ or in isolation from the eternal will of the Father. Any endeavor to think of the Spirit in terms that are entirely mystical and divorced from Scripture will take us down all kinds of side streets and eventually to dead ends.
- (3) **The Holy Spirit was the agent of creation** - Third, the Holy Spirit was the agent of creation. In the account of creation at the very beginning of the Bible, we are told, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”* (Gen. 1:1–2). The Hebrew word translated as “Spirit” here is *ruach*, which also can mean “breath.” The *ruach elohim*, “the Breath of the Almighty,” is the agent in creation. It is not the immateriality of the Spirit that is in view here, but rather His power and energy; the picture is of God’s energy breathing out creation, as it were, speaking the worlds into existence, putting the stars into space. Thus, when we read Isaiah 40:26 and the question is asked, “Who created these?” we have the answer in Genesis 1:2—the Spirit is the irresistible power by which God accomplishes His purpose. Tangentially, one of the questions of Old Testament scholarship concerns the

extent to which we are able to discover the distinct personhood of God the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament. In other words, can we understand the nature of His hypostasis in the Old Testament alone? When we read Genesis 1, it is not difficult to see that we have in the second verse, certainly in light of all that has subsequently been revealed, a clear and distinct reference to the third person of the Trinity. In his book *The Holy Spirit*, Sinclair B. Ferguson notes that if we recognize the divine Spirit in Genesis 1:2, that provides what some refer to as the missing link in Genesis 1:26, where God said, “Let us make man in our image.” Ferguson observes that this is a clear antecedent reference to the Spirit of God who is at work in Genesis 1:1–2. This issue reminds us, incidentally, that it is helpful to read our Bibles backward. As we read from the back to the front, we discover the truth of the classic interpretive principle attributed to Augustine: “The New [Testament] is in the Old [Testament] concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed.” In other words, we discover the implications of those teachings and events that come earlier in the Scriptures.

- (4) **The Holy Spirit is the author of the new birth** - Fourth, the Holy Spirit is the agent not only of creation, but also of God’s new creation in Christ. He is the author of the new birth. We see this in John 3, in the classic encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, where Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This truth, of course, is worked out in the rest of the Scriptures.
- (5) **The Spirit is the author of the Scriptures** - Fifth, the Spirit is the author of the Scriptures. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us, **“All Scripture is breathed out by God.”** The Greek word behind this phrase is *theopneustos*, which means “God-breathed.” In creation, we have the Spirit breathing His energy, releasing the power of God in the act of creation. We have the same thing in the act of redemption, and we see it again in the divine act of giving to us the record in the Scriptures themselves. The doctrine of inspiration is entirely related to the work of God the Holy Spirit. Peter affirms this view, writing, “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The men who wrote the biblical books were not inventing things. Neither were they automatons. They were real people in real historical times with real DNA writing according to their historical settings and their personalities. But the authorship of Scripture was dual. It was, for instance, both Jeremiah and God, because Jeremiah was picked up and carried along. Indeed, in Jeremiah’s case, God said, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (Jer. 1:9). He did so without violating Jeremiah’s distinct personality, and he then wrote the very Word of God. This is why we study the Bible—because this is a book that exists as a result of the out-breathing of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the identity of the Helper, we could go on *ad infinitum*, but we must be selective rather than exhaustive. His identity is as “another Helper.” The word translated as “another” here is *allos*, not *heteros*. Jesus promised a Helper of the same kind rather than of a different kind. The Spirit is the *parakletos*, the one who comes alongside. Jesus said He would “be with you forever . . . he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). In other words, His ministry is both permanent and personal.

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING**

*“<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” – Ephesians 4*

This takes us back to Ephesians 4:1, where Paul implores us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. There is a general call of the gospel that goes out to all (Matt. 22:14), but there is the effectual call of God that opens our hearts to respond to the gospel with saving faith (Acts 16:14; see Rom. 8:30; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rev. 17:14). It is that call that saves us that unites us into the one body through the one Spirit.

When Paul mentions *“the hope of your calling”* (see 1:18, “the hope of His calling”), he is referring to the yet future aspect of our salvation, the second coming of Jesus Christ, when we will be changed totally to be like Christ and share His glory. Paul refers to Christ’s coming as “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). John says that when we see Jesus at His return, we will be changed into His likeness. Then he adds (1 John 3:3), “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

In the Bible, hope is not uncertain, as we often use the term. We say, “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow,” but it is just a wish. But biblical hope is absolutely certain, but not yet realized. It is certain because God has promised it and He never fails to keep His promises. We just haven’t experienced it yet at this point in time. Although mockers may scoff at the promise of Christ’s coming, God is not slow about His promise (2 Pet. 3:3-4, 9). When He comes, we will be caught up to be with Him forever. Those who reject Him will face His wrath and judgment. As with the doctrine of the Spirit, so with matters of prophecy, there is division among Christians. But all genuine Christians are united on this one fact, that Jesus is coming back bodily in power and glory. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us hope as we believe in the promise of His coming (Rom. 15:13). This is the hope of our calling.

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE LORD**

*“<sup>5</sup> One Lord, one faith, one baptism....” – Ephesians 4:5*

We move here from the Spirit to Jesus Christ. It is significant that “Lord” is consistently used in the Old Testament to refer to Yahweh, the one true God, whereas in the New Testament, it most often refers to Jesus Christ. This one Lord, Jesus Christ Himself, “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). Thus all true biblical unity centers in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord.

If a person or a religious group denies what the Bible teaches about the person of Jesus, that He is fully God and fully man, we are not in unity with them. If they deny His substitutionary death on the cross as the only means by which we can be reconciled to God, we are not one with them. If they deny the need to submit everything to Jesus as Lord and to live so as to please Him, we are not one with them. He is our Lord both by virtue of who He is, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe; and, by what He did, purchasing us with His blood on the cross. If someone claims to know Christ as Savior, but denies that He is their Lord, you need to challenge him on whether he truly knows Him as Savior. At best, you cannot enjoy true fellowship with a professing Christian who by a disobedient life denies the lordship of Jesus Christ.

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE FAITH**

*“<sup>5</sup> One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” – Ephesians 4:5*

Some reputable commentators interpret this to mean the faith that saves or justifies us (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 336; Harold Hoehner, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck [Victor Books), 2:633). But I agree with most commentators that it refers to the Christian faith (in the sense of Eph. 4:13; Jude 3), especially to the core truths that are essential for the gospel. While godly believers may disagree over certain doctrines, there are some essential doctrines that every true believer affirms.

Every true believer holds that the eternal God sent His eternal Son, who took on human flesh through the virgin birth. This God-man lived a perfect life and offered Himself on the cross in the place of sinners, paying the debt that we owe. He was raised bodily from the dead, He ascended bodily into heaven, and He is coming back bodily to judge the world and to reign forever. We receive the salvation that He offers by grace alone through faith alone, apart from any merit or works on our part. If a person denies any of these core truths of the gospel, he does not hold to the one faith and there is no basis for unity with him and us.

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE BAPTISM**

*“<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptisml.” – Ephesians 4:5*

Some think that this refers to the baptism of the Spirit, which takes place at salvation. But it occurs here in the verse about God the Son, the one Lord. Thus I think it refers to the act of water baptism, where those who have trusted in Christ as Savior confess Him publicly in obedience to His command.

Again, as with the one Spirit and one hope, so there is controversy among Christians over the subjects and mode of baptism. Some baptize infants by sprinkling. We baptize by

immersion only those children or adults who confess Christ as Savior and Lord. These debates will probably go on until we're all with the Lord (at which point, we'll all be Baptists!). But here Paul is focusing on the basic meaning of baptism, namely, identification with Jesus Christ. When a person is baptized, it signifies that he or she is totally identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, so that now we walk in newness of life in Him (Rom. 6:3-6). The water signifies being cleansed from all our sins (Acts 2:38). Baptism in water is not necessary for salvation (to say so would be to commit the Galatian heresy), but it is the necessary result of salvation, which produces obedience to Christ in the hearts of His children. Finally...

## **BIBLICAL UNITY IS BUILT ON THE TRUTH THAT THERE IS ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL**

*“<sup>6</sup>One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” – Ephesians 4:6*

Commentators differ over whether the four “all’s” in this verse are masculine, referring to people, or neuter, referring to the cosmos. There is a sense in which both are true, but in the context, Paul is talking about the church. He means that God is the *Father* of all believers. He is *over* them in a personal sense as their Sovereign Lord. He is *through* all believers in the sense of working through them. He is *in* all in the sense of personally indwelling us. We are His dwelling place in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22; see, John 14:23).

Paul’s fourfold use of “all” emphasizes the common unity that we share with all true believers. If God is the *Father of all* believers, we are brothers and sisters. If He is *over all*, then we all submit to Him as our Sovereign Lord. We hold His Word as the authority for faith and practice. If He is *through all*, I must trust that He is working through my brothers and sisters, as well as through me. I am not His only servant; He has many others. If He is *in all*, then I must respect my brother or sister’s experience with God and I must see God in them. When I serve them, I am serving Him. When I love them, I am loving Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

J. C. Ryle, the godly 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglican bishop, wrote (source unknown), “Unity and peace are very delightful; but they are bought too dear if they are bought at the expense of truth. Controversy, in fact, is one of the conditions under which truth in every age has to be defended and maintained, and it is nonsense to ignore it.”

### **Practical Ways to Apply Paul’s Truths in Ephesians 4:4-6:**

**(1) To apply Paul’s words, we must be diligent to preserve the true unity that already exists among all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.**

- (2) At the same time, we must be careful not to water down, compromise, or set aside these fundamental elements that form the basis for true Christian unity.
- (3) We must remember that we are *not* one with those who deny or pervert the gospel.
- (4) To act as if we are causes great confusion and harm - *How? In what ways?* It causes undiscerning believers to fall into serious error. It causes unbelievers to be confused about the gospel, by which alone they might be saved.
- (5) To preserve Christian unity, we must make sure that we are founded on the biblical basis for unity—these truths that Paul here sets forth.