

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

(LESSON FORTY-THREE)

“ONE SPIRIT AND ONE HOPE”

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

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

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

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

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

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

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

In **Ephesians** chapter **4**, the Apostle Paul deals with the fundamental nature and purpose of the Church, and how the Church relates to the world. Unfortunately, there are many genuine believers, who do not understand the nature and purpose of the Church and its relationship to the world in which they live.

Most of the misconceptions of what the Church is and how it should operate, arise because the Church itself has forgotten its calling. In this chapter, Paul is reminding the believers in Ephesus about their calling.

Brothers and sisters, the Church does not have the right to chart its own course. Its goal has already been set and its purpose has already been determined by its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 3, Paul writes, “*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” In this verse, he informs us of two very important truths about the church that are clearly evident. Firstly, there is the clear implication of the existence of differences among believers. He says we should be eager to preserve or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but there would be no need for such an exhortation if differences did not exist in the Body.

Brothers and sisters, there is no group in the world that is as gloriously diverse as the Church. One of the marvels of the Church is that it is comprised of different kinds of people. The Church of Jesus Christ crosses over every boundary erected by human beings and seeks to unite all kinds of people, without exception, into one body. There is no other group in the world that attempts to unite people from such widely divergent races, culture, language and experience. Indeed, it is only God Almighty who could have conceived of such an entity and it is He alone who can make it a reality

The second of the two very important truths about the church that are evident in the verse is that there is a basic unity that already exists. It is significant that Paul does not write, “Endeavouring to **create** the unity of the Spirit,” but “*Endeavouring to **keep** the unity of the Spirit.*” We are never told to **create** or **manufacture** unity in the church. We are urged to **keep**, or **preserve**, or **maintain** the unity that is already there by virtue of the very existence of the church. There is no need to create unity, in fact we are unable to create unity. One of the problems that exists in the Church today is that well-meaning persons are ignoring the unity that already exists and are striving to create a unity that is not organic, but is imposed. This kind of unity is usually nothing more than uniformity. It is important for us to recognize that what Paul refers to is

the “*unity of the Spirit*.” This unity is created, by the Holy Spirit working in the human spirit of believers.

There are those who are trying to create a unity of the flesh, an organizational unity which draws its power from the number of bodies which can be joined together, quite apart from the convictions and spiritual agreement engendered by the Spirit of God. This kind of unity is bound to fail for it is not God-inspired, but man-inspired. Such a unity denies the supernatural character of Christ and reduces the church to a natural, human religious society, devoid of supernatural life and energy.

There are, basically, two kinds of unity. One is an internal, spiritual unity which manifests occasional external disagreement. This is the unity of the Spirit that is resident in the Church, an internal unity with occasional external disagreement. The other kind of unity is an external, carnal unity without internal agreement. This kind of unity is in reality uniformity, which the **Cambridge English Dictionary** defines as, “The quality or fact of being the same, or of not changing or being different in any way.” The control and direction in groups that promote this kind of unity always rests with a small number of individuals at the top, whose power is measured by how successful they are in getting the mass to follow them. This kind of unity is imposed from outside and it usually has to be forced. In contrast to this, the unity of the Spirit, is the unity of shared life, generated and motivated internally by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.

In chapter 4 of this letter, the apostle Paul is describing the real unity of the Body of Christ.

In **Lesson 41**, we stated that in the first 3 verses of chapter 4, the Apostle Paul emphasized **The Grace of Unity**, while in verses 4-6, he highlights **The Ground of Unity**.

In these verses Paul lists **7** basic spiritual realities of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. These are **One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God**.

All these basic spiritual realities of oneness should serve to motivate believers to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Whenever we are tempted to break the unity of the Spirit, we need to remember these 7 unifying truths.

The first of the spiritual realities that Paul refers to is **“One Body.”** This is a reference to the Mystical Body of Christ-the Church. There is only one body of true believers, with no class, racial, cultural, gender, national, or language differences. There are no “first class” and “second class” citizens in the Body of Christ. Every believer has an equal right with all other believers to the privileges of membership in the Body. Every believer should be ready to acknowledge every other believer as a fellow-heir of God and a fellow-joint heir with Christ, no matter what his or her nationality, colour, class, or gender may be.

Please note that Paul does not say “There is one organization.” He says “There is one body.” A body is much more than an organization. The essence of a body is that it consists of thousands of cells with **one** mutually shared life. It is the sharing of this life that makes a body different than an organization. **The basic, fundamental, underlying unity of a body exists despite surface divisions.**

The members of the Body of Christ do not all belong to one denomination or organization, but we are all one, because we have entered together into the experience of the unity of the Spirit, produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit.

In Paul’s day, there were many individual churches, which were distinct, each with its own leadership and membership. The church in Corinth was not identical to the church in Ephesus, which was not identical to the church in Philippi or in Antioch. Therefore, when Paul makes reference to the unity of the church, he is referring to something that transcends local manifestations of the visible church. He is referring primarily to the one invisible Church, the universal Church that is made up of everyone who is united to Christ by faith. Local churches may

vary in their visible expression, but the Church of Christ is finally and invisibly one Body.

A body is not produced by combining sections of anatomy together. A body is produced by the extension of one original cell, growing until it becomes a full-fledged mature body. Every cell of the body shares the life of the original cell. The secret of a body is that all the parts of it share life together. That is why the Church is not just an organization, it is one Body and Only the Holy Spirit can produce it.

The knowledge of what the Body of Christ means, the insight into its glory and its purpose, and the fulfilling of the place and ministry to which God has called us in the Body, have a deep connection with spiritual life. To receive the Spirit and the love of Christ means death to every vestige of selfishness. We must surrender our life and love entirely to Christ and His Body. The welfare of every member becomes the supreme object of our desire. Let us try to realize what this Body is in which the blessed Spirit of God seeks to manifest Himself.

This brings us to the second thing that Paul mentions as a basic spiritual reality that unites all true believers in the Body of Christ and serves as a Ground of Unity. It is *“One Spirit.”* Most Bible scholars agree that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The late evangelical Christian pastor, and author, **Ray Stedman**, in commenting on the Holy Spirit in this context, made the following remarks:

“Here is the great, eternal, invisible Person who is the power behind the Christian church. The strength of the church **never** comes from its numbers. This is the mistaken concept that many Christians have today. They think we only influence society and bear impact upon the world as we can gather together enough Christians and thus swing enough votes to sway our legislatures. That is not where the power of the church lies, and it never has. The prophet Zechariah was once confronted with a great mountain which God said would become a plain. When Zechariah began to look around to see how this could happen, where the power would come from, what instruments would be provided to level that

mountain and make it into a plain, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, *“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts”* (**Zechariah 4:6**). **It is the Spirit that is the true power of the church, and there is only one Spirit.** He is the same everywhere no matter where the church exists-in every place and in every age. That is why the truth remains unchangeable, the passing of time does not change it. That is why the church is not dependent on many or few, or on the wisdom of its membership. It depends on one thing, the one Spirit.”

As there is one body, so there is one Spirit, which is the life of that body and dwells in all its members. In **1 Corinthians 12:13**, Paul writes, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*

Here Paul informs us that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is experienced by all who believe, at the moment of salvation. It is this “baptism of the Spirit” that places a person into the “**one Body**.” It is unfortunate that the term “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” has been divorced from its original New Testament meaning. The baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion when the Spirit enters the believing sinner, gives him or her new life, and makes his or her body the temple of God. All genuine believers have experienced this once-for-all baptism. In **Romans 8:9**, Paul clearly indicates this: *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”* Nowhere does the Scripture command us to seek this baptism, because we have already experienced it and it need not be repeated.

In **Ephesians 5:18**, Paul writes, *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”* The “filling of the Spirit” mentioned in this verse is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit.” The “filling of the Spirit,” has to do with the Holy Spirit’s control of our lives. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, and the way to ensure that is for us to intentionally and consistently yield to

His promptings. We constantly need to be filled with spiritual power if we are to glorify Christ. To be baptized by the Spirit means that we belong to Christ's body. To be filled with the Spirit means that our bodies belong to Christ.

There is no doctrine of Scripture more plainly revealed than that the Spirit of God dwells in all believers, and that His presence is the ultimate ground of their unity as the body of Christ. As the human body is one because it is permeated by one soul; so the Body of Christ is one because it is permeated by one and the same Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that all sins against unity, are sins against the Holy Spirit. Our relation to the **one Spirit** Who in-dwells all believers, demands of us all that we love each and live in unity with each other.

Brothers and sisters, it is the one Spirit that awakened all of us, converted all of us, and baptized all of us into one Body. It is the one Spirit that leads all of us into all truth, convicts all of us of sin, empowers all of us for service and is conforming all of us into the image of Jesus Christ. It is the one Spirit that causes us to cry "*Abba, Father.*" It is the one Spirit Who indwells each believer, so that we belong to each other in the Lord. The Holy Spirit is the source and the power in which believers, as members of one Body in Christ Jesus, are to minister to each other to build up the Body of Christ.

The missionary and author **Ruth Paxson**, made the following comments with which I wholeheartedly agree: "On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended to form the Body of Christ. The hundred and twenty individual persons in the upper room were fitly joined together into one Body through the Spirit's baptism. This same Spirit took up His abode in the Church and in each Christian, and by His indwelling and inworking He maintains a visible, vital unity in the Body of Christ."

The third spiritual reality of oneness that unites all true believers in the Body of Christ is **One Hope**. Paul writes, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.*"

This **One hope** includes everything that all believers will experience at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and forever thereafter. All believers will be with Christ; they will all be like Christ; they will all be joint heirs with Christ, and they will all be delivered forever from the presence of sin. This expectation of seeing Jesus, our “*Blessed Hope*,” and being like Him, is entertained equally by all believers. All members of the true Church are called to the one destiny of being taken out of this world, being like Christ, and sharing His glory forever.

The fact that Paul qualifies this “hope” as “*one hope*,” emphasizes that there is the same ultimate, glorious reality for all the members of the church, whether Jew or Gentile, whether male or female, whether black or white, whether rich or poor! Paul wants to make certain that all believers fully understand that there is no differentiation between Christians. Because all believers have the same hope, they should therefore be one.

In **1 Peter 1:3-5**, the Apostle Peter writes the following:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter refers to the hope of believers as a “*lively hope*.” It is a hope that is actively alive as an energizing principle of divine life in the believer, producing hopefulness and optimism, no matter what circumstances he or she may be facing. It is both an attitude of expectancy as the Christian looks forward to the inheritance awaiting him or her in heaven, and a hopefulness of present blessing from God in this life, in light of the eternal blessedness in the next life.

As begotten children of God, we become His heirs, and joint-heirs with His Son Jesus Christ, and therefore we have come into an inheritance. This inheritance is incorruptible because it belongs to the future life which the risen believers share with God Himself. It is undefiled as our great High Priest is undefiled. It is non-fading, it does not wither away, as a flower does. It is *“reserved in heaven”* for us. The word *“reserved”* is the translation of a Greek word which means “to watch, to guard, to protect, to set aside.” Heaven is the safe-deposit box where God is guarding our inheritance for us under constant surveillance. The participle is in the perfect tense, speaking of a past completed action which has present results. The inheritance of believers has been laid up and is now kept guarded in safe deposit.

But not only is our inheritance being kept guarded in heaven under the watchful eye of God, **we** are being safe-guarded by God’s protecting care. Peter assures us that we are *“kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* The Greek word translated *“kept”* is a military term, meaning “to guard or protect.” It is in a construction in the Greek which implies action constantly going on. The guarding and protecting of the child of God is going on constantly. Our guards are on duty twenty-four hours a day, year in and year out, until we arrive safe in heaven.

This protection is God’s response to our faith which we exercised in the Lord Jesus as Saviour. This same faith now rests in Him as our Preserver. The salvation spoken of here by Peter is of course the glorification of our bodies. We received our justification at the moment we believed. We are receiving our sanctification now, and we will, without fail, receive that part of salvation which awaits us in Glory. We have *“a lively hope.”*

In **1 Timothy 1:1** Paul writes, *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.”* Paul refers to Jesus Christ as *“our hope.”* This is a beautiful truth, for what Paul is saying is that the hope of the believer is not a

vague, abstract concept, but ultimately finds its very essence and fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ Himself who is our hope. In using the personal pronoun “*our*” Paul is emphasizing that this hope is our very own possession. It is the possession of every child of God. This is a simple truth with profound implications. We did not deserve this nor could we ever have merited it, but because of God’s great salvation and because of our eternally secure position in Christ, we can cling confidently to the great doctrine of the believer’s hope as “our hope!” Our hope is secure because Jesus Christ, who is our hope, is “*the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.*” He does not change.

Brothers and sisters, our hope is not a plan, nor a program. It is not even a promise. Ultimately our hope is a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most significant aspects of this “*hope*” is the absolute certainty that He is returning to take us home, where we will spend eternity with Him in complete perfection, free from sin, shame and sadness! In **John 14:1-3** He said to His disciples

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 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.

3 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.

The hope of our calling is the absolute certainty of our heavenly destiny. This is what Paul referred to in **Titus 2:13** as the “*blessed hope.*”

In **1 John 3:2-3**, the Apostle John speaks of a hope which should have a unifying effect on all genuine believers, no matter what their denomination. He writes, “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God (we are all in God’s family and in one body-the church), and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear (not if He appears, but when He appears. John speaks with the certainty which is the essence of the meaning of the word hope), we shall be like him;*

*for we shall see him as he is (this describes the future and final aspect of our redemption, of which the Holy Spirit now serves as a pledge, according to **Ephesians 1:14**). And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”*

This “**One Hope**” that all believers share is a “purifying hope” which unites all believers who long for Christ’s return.

Hope, as the world typically defines it, is a desire for some future thing which we are uncertain of attaining. We say for example, “I hope this or that will happen,” and it is this type of “hope” which explains why the lottery system is thriving in Jamaica! This kind of hope is merely an optimistic desire that something that we want to happen will happen. This hope is not a guaranteed hope because it is subject to changeable people and changeable circumstances.

On the other hand, Biblical hope is defined as a desire for future good with the expectation of obtaining it because it is promised to us by God. Hope is the Christian’s attitude toward the future. Hope is an absolute assurance of future good. Hope is a strong confidence that God will do what He has promised to do.

Hope for the Christian is not merely a feeling of “I hope it will happen” but it is an exciting expectancy and certainty that it will happen, because God controls the future. Our hope for the future is based on the promises in God’s Word. In other words, the basis for the hope of believers is the character of God.

The hope of every genuine child of God is to be with the Lord and to be like the Lord. While we are thankful for the progressive sanctification which goes on every day in our inner-heart lives, we long for that day when the imperfect will give way to the perfect, and redemption will be consummated in glorification. The one hope that in these days unifies all believers as perhaps no other is the blessed hope of His soon return to take us all unto Himself. It is the hope expressed so eloquently and so

longingly in the final verse of Robert Robinson's hymn, "***Come, Thou fount of every blessing.***"

*"O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothèd then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
Take my ransomed soul away;
Send Thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day."*

As we await that great day, it is the will of God that this "***One Hope,***" unite all true believers in the Body of Christ.