

WE ARE ONE!  
Ephesians 4:4-6

*There are two key passages about Christian unity in the New Testament. The first is the intercessory prayer of Jesus in John 17. The second is the practical exhortations of Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16.*

Ephesians 4:1 marks a transition from the doctrinal to the practical section of this letter. Chapters 1-3 are about the believer's wealth in Christ. Chapters 4-6 are about the believer's walk in Christ. Verse 1 says: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." How do Christians walk worthy? Verse 2 answers: "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love." Christians walk worthy of their calling by walking together in unity. Verse 3 exhorts us to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Christian unity is a work of the Holy Spirit, not a product of human effort. But what is this "unity of the Spirit"? Ephesians 4:4-6 explains: "There is one body, one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

In John 17:20-21, Jesus prays for us: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." This has been called the unanswered prayer of Jesus: "that they may all be one." This makes sense when you consider the disagreements, disharmony, and division among Christians. But Jesus has no unanswered prayers. In John 11:42, Jesus says to the Father, "You always hear me." God the Father has answered Jesus' prayer to make us one. Ephesians 4:4-6 is the proof. Here Paul presents the source, grounds, or means of Christian unity. It is not organizational unity. It is spiritual unity.

These verses list seven ways Christians are one. And this sevenfold basis of Christian unity is organically connected to the Trinity. Verse 4 lists the ways the Holy Spirit makes us one. Verse 5 lists the ways the Lord Jesus Christ makes us one. And verse 6 lists the ways God the Father makes us one. The unity of the church is securely rooted in the unity of the Godhead. John Stott comments: "You can no more multiply churches than you can multiply Gods. Is there only one God? Then he has only church? Is the unity of God inviolable? Then so is the unity of the church. The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead." Ephesians 4:4-6 teaches we are one in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

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## I. WE ARE ONE IN GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Verse 4 says: "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call." Here are three ways we are one in God the Holy Spirit.

## A. ONE BODY

The New Testament does not define the nature of the church, as much as it describes it with various word-pictures. But the primary metaphor for the church in the New Testament is a body. Christ is the head of the church. And the church is the body of Christ. To be a Christian is to be under the authority of the head and joined in fellowship with the body. Romans 12:4-5 says: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” We are one body in Christ. It consists of all the redeemed of all the ages – from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture of the church. There are no separate bodies for different races, cultures, backgrounds, temperaments, or preferences. There are many Christians, independent congregations, and unique denominations. But there is only one body in Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:27 says: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

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## B. ONE SPIRIT

I am a person. I live in a body. And only one person lives within my body. This is true of every human being. And it is also true of the church of Jesus Christ. We are one body. The body of Christ is divinely animated by one Spirit. R. KENT HUGHES rightly comments: “The Holy Spirit creates, fills, coordinates, orchestrates, and empowers the Body of Christ.”

There are two essential questions about the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. First, who is the Holy Spirit? There are two answers to that question. The Holy Spirit is a person. And the Holy Spirit is God. Second, where is the Holy Spirit? There are likewise two answers to this question. The Holy Spirit is everywhere. And the Holy Spirit lives within every Christian. Romans 8:9b says: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” When someone asks if you have received the Holy Spirit, they are really asking if you are saved. If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are not saved. But the Holy Spirit lives within every person who trusts the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ for salvation. This is what makes us one in Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 says: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” We are one body in one Spirit. Every sin against the body is a sin against the Spirit. So we must be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

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## C. ONE HOPE

Verse 4 says: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.” This parenthetical clause that closes the verse speaks of the future hope to which every Christian is divinely called. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul

prays the saints will have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” We have been called to one hope. It is the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. Our inheritance in Christ is not so much about what we will receive as it is about what we will become. And we are to live in light of the hope to which we have been called. Ephesians 4:1 says: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” This one hope of our calling makes us one in Christ. There is division when we look back and when we look around. But there is unity when we look ahead. We may not agree on all the details of eschatology. But all true believers share the future hope of the Second Coming. 1 John 3:2 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

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## **II. WE ARE ONE IN GOD THE SON.**

Verse 4 lists three truths that make us one in God the Holy Spirit: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.” Verse 5 lists three truths that make us one in God the Son: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” This is the golden verse of the ecumenical movement. When Christians of different denominations seek common ground to work together they claim one Lord, one faith, one baptism. This is the irreducible basis of Christian unity. But this verse offers no watered down agreement. Here are three big truths that make us one in God the Son.

### **A. ONE LORD**

The one Lord is the Jesus Christ. This is the first Christian creed: Jesus is Lord. Romans 10:9 says: “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” You cannot be saved without confessing Jesus as Lord. Romans 10:12-13 says: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Note that scripture does not give us the option of accepting Jesus as Savior but rejecting him as Lord. The one who saves is Lord. In fact, Paul speaks of our oneness in Christ here in terms of one Lord, not one Savior. Every believer confesses Jesus as Lord in salvation. And every unbeliever will confess Jesus as Lord in judgment. Philippians 2:9-11 says: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is not a picture of universal salvation. It is a picture of sovereign Lordship. Christians are one in confession and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION  
IS JESUS CHRIST HER LORD  
WITH HIS OWN BLOOD HE BOUGHT HER,  
AND FOR HER LIFE HE DIED

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## **B. One Faith**

The New Testament speaks of faith two ways: subjectively and objectively. Most instances refer to the subjective experience of faith. In Acts 16:31, Paul and Silas tell the Philippian jailor, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." Salvation requires personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But there are places in the New Testament where faith refers to objective truth, not subjective experience. It is the content of the faith we believe. Jude 3 says: "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." There is a body of truth that represents the biblical and historic Christian faith. Acts 2:42 calls it "the Apostle's teaching." And it is one.

There are Christians who deemphasize theology on the basis that doctrine divides. But togetherness devoid truth is appeasement, not unity. J.C. RYLE rightly said: "Unity is mighty but it is worthless if it is purchased at the cost of truth." Christian unity is built upon truth not without truth. Indeed, there are points of doctrine upon which Christians disagree. They are important issues. But they are in-house debates within the pale of orthodoxy. Yet there are some points of doctrine upon which there must be no disagreements. This is what verse 5 means by "one faith." Either you believe these things or you are not a Christian. Saving-faith confesses: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

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## **C. ONE BAPTISM**

The New Testament speaks of baptism two ways. There is what is called Spirit baptism. It is the supernatural, invisible, and non-experiential work of the Holy Spirit to join us to the body of Christ. But there is also water baptism. It is a visible symbol of Spirit baptism. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism is not a human tradition that you can reject at your discretion. The Lord Jesus commands his disciples to be marked by immersion in water in the triune name of the living God. This public act of personal confession identifies the believer with the death,

burial, and resurrection of Christ. It also identifies the believer with the church of Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:27-28 says: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

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### **III. WE ARE ONE IN GOD THE FATHER.**

Verse 6 says: “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The verse begins with an affirmation of monotheism. There is only one true and living God. The oneness of God is the first principle of Jewish theology. Deuteronomy 6:4 says: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” It is also the first principle of Christian theology. 1 Timothy 2:5 says: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Jesus Christ has revealed God to exist in three coequal, coeternal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This truth is assumed in our text as verse 4 presents our oneness in God the Spirit, verse 5 presents our oneness in God the Son, and verse 6 presents our oneness in God the Father. Yet we do not believe in three gods. There is only one God. And this one God is our Father. God relates to unbelievers in two ways: as Creator and Judge. But God is our Father in heaven to all who trust in Jesus. Verse 6 ends by telling us what it means for the one God to be Father of all.

#### **A. GOD THE FATHER IS OVER ALL.**

The fact that God the Father is over all declares his sovereign authority over all creation. Psalm 103:19 says: “The Lord has established his throne and in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” God in Christ reigns over heaven and earth. This truth unites the church in faith, hope, and love. Acts 12 records that Herod arrested Peter with plans to execute him after Passover. But the church met at Mary’s house to pray to the God who is above all. God sent an angel to deliver Peter from prison and he was knocking at Mary’s door before the church could finish their prayer meeting. At the end of Acts 12, King Herod was eaten alive by worms while sitting on his throne, because he did not give glory to God. God is above all. Proverbs 21:30 says: “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.”

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#### **B. GOD THE FATHER IS THROUGH ALL.**

The fact that God is through all denies the idea that God is cosmic Watchmaker who created the world and set it to run on its own devices without his involvement. The God of exhaustive sovereignty is also the God of pervasive providence. God works through it all. Joseph went from the pit to palace. And his brothers thought he would use his promotion to exact revenge against them. But in Genesis 50:19-20, Joseph says, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for your, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be keep alive, as they are today.” What God did for Joseph is what God does for all who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:28 says: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” God works through it all!

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### **C. GOD THE FATHER IS IN ALL.**

This verse declares the transcendence of God. He is “over all.” But it also declares the immanence of God. He is “in all.” God is infinitely above and beyond us. But God is no distant deity who is unmoved, untouched, or uncaring. God lives in us. We are one because every Christian enjoys the indwelling presence of the Life-Giver King. 1 John 4:13-15 says: “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” What a thought! God the Spirit lives in you! God the Son lives in you! And God the Father lives in you! Ephesians 3:20-21 says: “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”