

7

OBJECTIVE FACTS THAT PROVIDE THE COMMON GROUND FOR SHARING SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP

Introduction

1. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul has dealt with doctrine in which he has described both: (i) Our spiritual **possessions** in Christ, and, (ii) Our spiritual **position** in Christ. In the remaining three chapters, Paul will focus on **duty**, i.e., responsibilities that we are obliged to fulfill because of the blessings we have in Christ.
2. One of the blessings upon which Paul elaborates is the unity that we have in Christ by virtue of His work on the cross: He has reconciled both Jew *and* Gentile to God in “one body” (**Ephesians 2:14-16**). Paul describes this as a mystery that was not made known in previous ages, but has now been revealed by the Spirit, the apostles and prophets (**Ephesians 3:1-7**).
3. It should not be surprising, then, that our first obligation is “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (**Ephesians 4:3**). Christ attained this unity by His work on the cross and it is our duty to maintain it.

<p>7 OBJECTIVE FACTS THAT PROVIDE THE COMMON GROUND FOR SHARING SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP</p>

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is one body (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:14-16; 4:4a; Colossians 3:15). 2. There is one Spirit (Ephesians 2:18; 4:4b). 3. There is one hope (Ephesians 4:4c; 1 Peter 1:3-5). 4. There is one Lord (1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Ephesians 4:5a). 5. There is one Faith (Ephesians 4:5b; Jude 1:3). 6. There is one baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5c; 1 Peter 3:20-21). 7. There is one God and Father (Malachi 2:10; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Ephesians 4:6). |
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I. THE “ATTITUDES” FOR MAINTAINING UNITY (**Ephesians 4:1-3**)

Beginning with a charge to walk worthy of our calling (**Ephesians 4:1**), Paul describes how to have a “worthy walk”.

A. Lowliness:

1. The word “lowliness” is a translation of the Greek word *tapeinophrosune* and it means, “(1) The having a humble opinion of one’s self, 2) a deep sense of one’s (moral) littleness, 3) modesty, humility, lowliness of mind” (Thayer).
2. This virtue is necessary in order to properly value others around us (**cp. Philippians 2:3-4**). Without this virtue, members in the body begin trying to be the “head” of the body, a role reserved only for Christ (**cp. 3 John 1:9**).

B. Meekness:

1. The word “meekness” is a translation of the Greek word *praotes* and it means “gentleness, mildness, meekness” (Thayer). “Meekness relates to the manner in which we receive injuries. We are to bear them patiently, and not to retaliate, or seek revenge. The meaning here is, that; we adorn the gospel when we show its power in enabling us to bear injuries without anger or a desire of revenge, or with a mild and forgiving spirit” (Barnes). Meekness is not a quality of weakness, but of power under control. Consider:
 - a. Moses was very meek “more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (**Numbers 12:3**), but capable of great strength and boldness.
 - b. Jesus was meek (**Matthew 11:29**), and yet He drove the money changers out of the temple.

2. Meekness is being gentle and mild in the face of provocation; it does not retaliate or seek revenge. We can see, then, how meekness is conducive for maintaining unity.

C. Longsuffering:

1. The word “longsuffering” is a translation of the Greek word *makrothumia* and it means “1) patience, endurance, constancy, steadfastness, perseverance, 2) patience, forbearance, longsuffering, slowness in avenging wrongs” (Thayer). “It is a patient holding out under trial; a long-protracted restraint of the soul from yielding to passion, especially the passion of *anger*” (VWS).
2. The body of Christ consists of members that have different characters, personalities, attitudes, and that are at different levels of spiritual maturity. It would seem that differences and disagreements are inevitable. If unity is to be maintained, then longsuffering is a necessity.

D. Bearing with one another in love:

1. The word “bearing” is a translation of the Greek word *anechomai* and it means “1) hold up, 2) to hold one’s self erect and firm, 3) to sustain, to bear, to endure” (Thayer). The idea is that we ought to be “overlooking the infirmities of one another, forgiving injuries done, sympathizing with, and assisting each other in distressed circumstances, the spring of all which should be love” (Gill).
2. If we fail to bear with one another, the church will quickly be filled with all kinds of quarrelling, fighting, etc. You can see, then, that bearing with one another is essential in maintaining unity.

E. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:

1. The word “endeavoring” is a translation of the Greek word *spoudazo* and it means “1) to hasten, make haste, 2) to exert one’s self, endeavour, give diligence” (Thayer).
2. Every Christian must exert himself to “keep the unity of the Spirit”. The word “keep” is a translation of the Greek word *tereo* and it means “1) to attend to carefully, take care of 1a) to guard” (Thayer).
3. What we must exert ourselves to guard is “the unity of the Spirit”, i.e., the unity given by the Spirit. “Through the Holy Spirit, God has revealed all the essential elements of unity” (Dunagan).
4. All this is to be accomplished “in the bond of peace”. “A *bond* is something which binds together, a band. *Peace* is the bond which ties the unity of the Spirit together. It is not possible for unity to exist where there is enmity or discord. Nothing good can happen where fighting is going on (James 3:16, 18)” (CP).

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• with all humility• and gentleness• with patience• showing forbearance to one another in love• being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace	Five Means to Gain Unity ★ Ephesians 4:2-3
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II. SEVEN OBJECTIVE FACTS THAT PROVIDE THE COMMON GROUND FOR SHARING SPIRITUAL FELLOWSHIP (Ephesians 4:4-6)

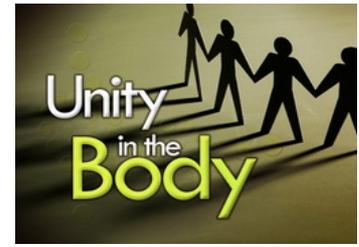
Keeping or guarding the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is only possible when each one is exerting the effort and manifesting lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearing. As well as having the right attitudes, it is also essential to understand and hold to the basis of unity.

A. One body:

1. This refers to the *universal* body of Christ, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; cp. Matthew 16:18), of which He is the head (Ephesians 5:25). While there may be many “local” churches or congregations, there is only *one* universal church with *one* head - Jesus Christ.
2. In stating that there is “one body”, Paul is affirming the unity of affiliation and membership of brethren with one another. This is not speaking of human administration, but of spiritual relationship with Christ in His body. When one is immersed into Christ, he is immersed into His church (1 Corinthians 12:13).
3. Only those in Christ’s body or church share the same spiritual fellowship. It is a contradiction (i) to state that the myriad of “bodies” established by men are one body, and, (ii) to declare that the members are different “bodies” are in spiritual fellowship in Christ.

B. One Spirit:

1. This is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of promise (**Ephesians 1:3**), the guarantee of our inheritance (**Ephesians 1:14**), and by Whom both Jew and Gentile have access to the Father (**Ephesians 2:18**).
2. The fact that there is “one Spirit” suggests “unity of communication and manner of life” (Caldwell). The Holy Spirit has revealed the will of God (**Ephesians 3:1-5**; **1 Corinthians 2:7-13**), which, of course, implies one consistent revelation of truth. Unity among believers must be based on the revelation of Spirit (**1 Corinthians 1:10**) and our conduct must be governed by the Spirit (**Galatians 5:25**).
3. It is claimed by many that we can still dwell together in unity even though our doctrine differs, but the scriptures state: “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” (**2 John 1:9**). In fact, those that teach error must be marked and avoided: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (**Romans 16:17**).



C. One hope of your calling:

1. This pertains to “the resurrection of the dead” (**Acts 23:6**; **24:15**; **Romans 8:23-24**; **cp. 1 Corinthians 15:19-23**; **Philippians 3:10-11, 20-21**), which necessarily includes such concepts of salvation (**1 Thessalonians 5:8**) and eternal life (**Titus 1:2**; **3:7**). This one hope involves a unity of aspiration, purpose, and goals.
2. It is our common hope that binds us together because we know that we shall finally dwell with the Lord in heaven for all eternity (**Titus 1:1-2**).
3. “If Christians all have ‘one hope’, then we should all have the same basic goals and ambitions in common. We should all ‘value’ the same spiritual things. We should all recognize what is important and what is not (**Matthew 6:19-21**). We should all work towards helping others obtain eternal life. We should all realize how important it is to encourage each other so that we all gain this hope (**Hebrews 3:13**; **10:25**)” (Dunagan).

D. One Lord:

1. This refers to Jesus (**1 Corinthians 8:5-6**) whom God has made “both Lord and Christ” (**Acts 2:36**).
2. Unity is maintained when we accept the fact that there is only one Lord. We look to our Lord as our Master and Ruler; it is by His authority that we act: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (**Colossians 3:17**).
3. It is when we reject Jesus as Lord and exalt our own opinions or submit to other, religious authority figures that unity is destroyed.

E. One faith:

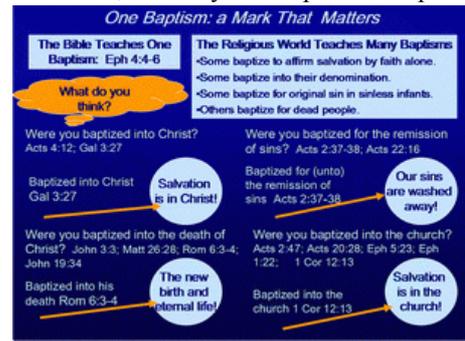
1. This the body of truth, “the faith”, which Jude says was “once for all delivered to the saints” (**Jude 1:3**). This suggests that unity is maintained by adhering to the same doctrines taught in the scriptures. “The one system of doctrine and its responsibilities in the lives of its believers is what binds us together in spiritual relationship to Christ” (Caldwell).
2. Many men have written creeds with the object of maintaining unity, but (i) such creeds are not inspired of God. Consider: if the creeds of men are inspired of God, then why do they contain conflicting doctrines? (ii) Rather than maintaining unity, they actually maintain existing divisions. Indeed, they prevent unity! Unity is only possible when men reject human creeds and submit to “the faith” once delivered to the saints (**Jude 1:3**).

THE BIBLE IS OUR ONLY CREED

In this our more “*enlightened age*”
Do we now turn from sacred page
To creeds of uninspired men
And look for hope and faith in them?
Cast aside these works of men
Who write with uninspired pen
And let them not be read again
That lead astray the souls of men
The Bible is our only creed
Inspired of God each word we read
Our hearts to heal our souls to feed
That holy book is all we need
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F. One baptism:

1. There are various baptisms mentioned in the New Testament (e.g., John’s baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit), but there is only one baptism that is commanded for the remission of sins, and only one baptism that puts us into Christ – immersion in water (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21; Galatians 3:27).
2. It is by our obedience to Christ’s command to be baptized (Mark 16:16) that we have received the remission of sins and are in Christ (Galatians 3:27). Here we need to be very clear: one that has not been baptized has *not* received the remission of sins, and one that has not been baptized is *not* in Christ. It is a mistake to refer to unbaptized persons as “Christians”.
3. Caldwell comments, “Our unity is established by entrance into the one Lord by obedience to the one form of doctrine (Romans 6:1-17). We therefore are united in one body, the church”.



G. One God and Father:

1. This was the great creed of Israel: “Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). A lawyer came to Jesus and asked which is “the first of all the commandments” (Mark 12:28). Jesus answered, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one’” (Mark 12:29).
2. One God implies unity of origin and source, and unity of worship. Indeed, the text in Deuteronomy continues, “You shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). There could be no unity of worship in religion if there were many gods. Idolatry is the result when men reject the truth - there is only one true and living God (Romans 1:18-23).
3. The unity of Christians with regard to God is expressed in the term “Father”. We are all the adopted children of God (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:29; 1 John 3:1). “We are, therefore, brothers and sisters. We compose a great spiritual brotherhood of believers who share a common relationship to our divine parent. He is our progenitor” (Caldwell).

Conclusion

1. These “seven ones” constitute “the unity of the Spirit” that as Christians we must be so diligent to keep “in the bond of peace”.
2. It is each one’s responsibility to put forth the effort to guard the unity of the Spirit. It is essential that the following truths are accepted and taught, and that the errors which contradict these truths are exposed.
 - a. There is one body or church and it is the Lord Himself that adds people to it, i.e., those who are saved (Acts 2:47). It is only those in the body of Christ that share the same spiritual fellowship.
 - b. There is one Spirit. Unity among believers must be based on the revelation of the Spirit and our conduct must be governed by the Spirit.
 - c. There is one hope of our calling. Our confident expectation is that we shall be raised from the dead and clothed with immortality. It is this common hope that binds us together.
 - d. There is one Lord. Unity is maintained when we accept the fact that there is only one Lord. We look to our Lord as our Master and Ruler; it is by His authority that we act: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17).
 - e. There is one faith. It is the one faith that was once for all delivered to the saints that binds us together in spiritual relationship to Christ.

- f. There is one baptism. This is the baptism by which we receive the remission of sins and that puts us into Christ. As Caldwell says, “Our unity is established by entrance into the one Lord by obedience to the one form of doctrine (**Romans 6:1-17**). We therefore are united in one body, the church”.
 - g. There is one God and Father. This suggests unity of worship. We are united in our belief and worship of the one true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
3. If we sincerely desire unity, then it is essential that we adopt or put on the right attitudes: lowliness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, and bearing with one another in love. With these attitudes in place, we must endeavor to keep or guard that which makes unity possible – the unity of the Spirit.

Note: The Lord has graciously provided gifts to the church to support unity: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These gifts will be discussed in another lesson.

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