

The Basis of Christian Unity Ephesians 4:4-6

Introduction:

1. What creates unity among a group of religious people? Various answers are given: performance of a specified ritual, physical birth and the due fulfillment of a religious ritual, assent to a creed, confession of faith, doctrinal statement or church covenant, agreement to keep a certain code of conduct, or the profession of a certain religious experience shared among the group members. In different groups you may find a combination of two or more of the above. However, none of these is the basis of true Christian unity. Do not misunderstand what I am saying. Since we live in a fallen world and cannot judge a person's hearts, a church may adopt some of the above as requirements for membership. Sometimes we have to do things for practical and organizational reasons. While the above answers may identify like-minded people, they do not produce the unity that the Scriptures have in mind.

2. The truth is that we cannot create unity. Unity among people is created by a supernatural act of God's grace. As we have already seen from this chapter, we can only keep the unity that God creates. That is our responsibility and we do it by living according to five attitudes set forth in 4:2-3. We must be completely humble, gentle, patient, put up with each other and make every effort to preserve the God-created unity. Although godly attitudes are essential, they are not all. Unity is also preserved through an understanding of its basis. It is here that the Christian minister encounters a difficulty.

a. Some hearers emphasize the understanding. For whatever reasons, they are inclined to want to stress this point, at times, to the exclusion of having proper attitudes.

b. Other hearers emphasize attitudes. They feel that part of the problem is that we want to get the mind in the way.

c. Actually, this is not an either/or issue. It is both/and. I have confidence that you, dear people that love the Lord and his Word, will hold both of these together.

Exposition: These verses set forth the sevenfold basis of unity that we are to **keep**. These seven declare our position. Therefore, we must strive to practice each of them. Notice also the repetition of the word *one* before each of the seven.

1. There is one body. That is, there is one mystical body of Christ.

[1] "Mystical" means "related to a spiritual communication or contact with God". We use the term mystical to distinguish it from Christ's physical body, and to avoid the confusion that the word spiritual might introduce.

[2] Every believer becomes part of this mystical body at the time of salvation. See Rm 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-13,27. Paul is repeating truth that he is already presented in this letter (1:22-23; 2:11-22; 3:6).

Point: Since we form the body of Christ, we should strive to show the unity of Christ before a watching world. Can you imagine how a local church can make Christ look ridiculous when it fights with itself? What would you think of me if I suddenly began to hit or pinch myself or began yelling at myself?

Action Step: In order to show that we are one, we must take observable steps to show that we are one. A great way is hospitality or works of compassion. For example, note how a Christian woman should live. 1 Tm 5:9-10

2. The is one Spirit.

[1] The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to each part of the body and lives in each part (1 Cor 12:13; 6:19; Rm 8:9,11).

[2] If we fail to pursue practical unity, we are separating one Spirit-indwelt member from another. This makes the Holy Spirit appear divided from himself, and it grieves him.

3. There is one hope.

[1] When we were called to salvation, God called us to the fullness of that salvation. We are called to eternal glory (2:7).

[2] This calling comes to us in the form of hope—confident expectation. It is something that we look forward to with assurance that what God has promised he is able to perform!

[3] Now if we confidently expect to share glory with all the called, it seems that we should like to share grace with them. Doesn't that make sense? If I claim that I want to live forever with the rest of the called saints, shouldn't I want to live with them now?

4. There is one Lord—the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1] He is the sovereign Ruler of God's people by right of God's appointment (Ac 2:35-36) and accomplished redemption (Rm 14:9; 1 Cor 6:19-20).

[2] As Paul will immediately say in the next section (4:7-11), the Ascended Christ exercises his lordship by giving gifts to each one of us. It is Christ who appoints men to positions of ministry in his church. In this stage of the new covenant (it has three stages—foundational, constructional and finality), two gifts continue, namely, evangelists and pastor/teachers.

Point: Those who claim allegiance to the same Lord must stand together. Should there be a civil war in Christ's kingdom? Christ would not set the members of his kingdom against each other. Since our task is to reflect the glory of Christ, we should make every effort to preserve his peace.

5. There is one faith.

[1] It is hard to ascertain whether faith is to be understood in an objective sense (the body of truth or what is taught in the Bible) or in a subjective sense (reliance on the Lord). It may be impossible to determine which one is meant. Certainly there is interchange between them. (If we trust in the Lord, that trust conforms to and is informed by the substance of faith. If we believe what the Lord says, we will trust him.)

[2] So then, in either case those that are called share a common faith. We all believe what the Lord says, and we all rely on him and commit ourselves to him. Since this is true, how can we disrupt this common faith?

Question: Does this demand that we form one large denomination and merge churches on a local level? No, I don't think so. On a practical level, we cannot undo 2000 years of church history. In addition, the Spirit uses different ministries to accomplish his work. Our task is not to convince everybody to agree with us [though we're probably right ☺]! Our task is to agree with God, and that is big enough to keep us all occupied.

Question: What do we do when we disagree over matters of faith and practice? Strange as it may sound, we sit down with open Bible and talk about what the Bible says! This requires a definition of terms, a gracious spirit, and all the other Biblical tools of communication.

6. There is one baptism.

[1] All believers share in the same confession of faith. When each one is baptized, he or she is baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). No one is baptized into the name of Paul or any other leader (1 Cor 1:13). We all confess saving union with the living God through Christ.

[2] This verse also demonstrates that baptism is only for believers. Otherwise, baptism would not be a basis for Christian unity, because it would be including those who are not savingly joined to Christ. This is significant in light of the common agreement of all evangelical commentators who assert that 4:6 refers only to the church.

Point: We ought to take baptism seriously. Not only are we professing faith in Christ. We are also proclaiming our union with other members of the body of Christ.

7. There is one God and Father of all.

[1] God the Father has a close relationship with all of his people. He and his chosen people form one family. He tenderly cares for each one, as a good, kind and loving Father. He provides for our needs and defends us from harm. He works all things for our good. Having such a good Father, we all seek his glory.

[2] Whenever we pray "Our Father in heaven," we claim him as our Father in common with all other believers. Shall we then contradict ourselves and separate from them?