

ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM, ONE FATHER

(Ephesians 4) We have been looking together at the seven great bonds that unite all true believers in Jesus Christ, these seven things we share in common that make us spiritually and practically one. You read them in verse **4-6** *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;*⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*⁶ *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* One of my responsibilities as a pastor is to participate in the work of the denomination and that means periodically serving and working as a commissioner to our denomination's General Assembly. When I return from such occasions I am often asked how the General Assembly went and usually I describe it as being wonderfully boring. Now, when it comes to denominational meetings, being good does not equate to being interesting. In these things, interesting usually means volatile and troubled, full of dissension and rancor. I have seen none of that in my four visits to the EPC, our denomination's, General Assembly. You would be impressed by the expression of unity there, and where there is unity among Christians it is because we recognize the truths mentioned in our text. There is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father. Now, over time, denominations do change. But, these things of which we read today do not change, whatever else may. So these are critical for us to understand and remember.

We have covered four of them already, looking at what it means to be made one body, by the One Spirit, sharing the one hope and having the same Lord. Today we come to bond #5 which is the one faith. This means that we are united by what we believe. Another word for faith is "belief." And our belief is mentioned as a point of commonality among us. Is that because Christians all believe the same things? Well, yes, they do in a sense but that certainly can't mean that Christians agree on everything. That is certainly not the case. This faith that unites us is not totally inclusive. There are some issues about which believer will differ from believer. I heard a story about a man who was despairing of his life and walked on to the Golden Gate Bridge intending to end it all. But it so happened that a preacher was on the bridge and saw the man just before he jumped. He yelled out, "Don't jump." And ran to his side. The preacher wasn't sure what to say, so he asked the despairing man, "Are you a Christian?" The man said, "Why, yes, I am." "Oh great" said the preacher, "I am too, what denomination?" The man said, "I'm a Baptist." "Wonderful," said the preacher, "I'm a Baptist too." Are you Northern Baptist or Southern?" The man said, "Northern

Baptist.” “Terrific” said the preacher, “so am I, isn’t this amazing! Tell me, are you Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?” The man said, “Northern Conservative Baptist.” “Splendid” said the preacher, “So am I. Now would that be Northern Conservative Reformed Baptist or Northern Conservative Fundamentalists Baptist?” He replied, “I’m Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist.” “Remarkable,” said the preacher, “that’s what I am too. Would you be Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region or Eastern District? The suicidal man said, “I’m Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region.” “Wow” said the preacher, “I too am Northern Conservative, fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region. This is truly amazing, but tell me, are you Northern Conservative Fundamentalist Baptist Great Lakes Region, Council of 1872 or Council of 1912?” The man said, “I am Northern Conservative, Fundamentalist Baptist, Great Lakes Region, Council of 1912.” When the preacher heard that he looked disgusted and said, “1912?! Die heretic!” And he pushed him off the bridge.

That story is intended to illustrate the futility of looking for a unity that is based on total agreement. You will never find that this side of glory. Thank God, someday everybody else is going to get straightened out. Someday we will all be in agreement. I don’t know exactly how it will happen, but the Bible says that now we see as in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. In the glory to come our thinking, our perception will be unclouded and there will no longer be any error, any doubt. Someone suggested that it will work like this. After the first few hundred years in glory the Apostle Paul will announce a theological workshop to be held in one of the mansions. All of the great theologians and preachers will be there and Paul will stand up among them and say something like this: “Dear Brothers, we know there is great curiosity among us to learn the answer to all of those disputed questions you struggled with in the former life. And to assist you in correcting your thinking we have put together a film that will serve to elucidate you all. Roll ‘em Mr. Calvin.” Yes, indeed, we can look forward to that in glory, we will be saved from all error, but that is one part of our salvation that we’d best not expect now. And that is not what Paul has in mind when he says we share one faith. Instead, there is something that makes up the core and essence of the Christian faith. One body of truth of the nature that one might express in a creed. In the little book of Jude, Jude writes Jude **3** *I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.* Did you catch the language there? Jude refers to “the faith.” He says it is something worth fighting for and he obviously has in mind a certain body of doctrine which he says was once for all delivered to the saints. I’m confident that

what Jude is calling “the faith” and Paul called “the one faith” is what they both would call the “gospel.” It is the core message of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the boiled-down essence of Christianity without which you may have something but you better not call it Christianity, cause it ain’t. That one faith includes the truth about Christ’s person, that He is God in human flesh. It includes the truth about Christ’s work, that He died on the cross for sinners. It includes the truth of His exaltation, that God raised Him up from the dead and crowned Him as Lord over all. It includes the truth about the way of salvation, that a man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone. This, my friend, is the faith. And this faith is shared by every true Christian of all time, everywhere. My Baptist brother and I share one faith. My Assembly of God brother and I share one faith. My Mormon brother and I, oops. The Mormon and I aren’t brothers precisely because we don’t share one faith. Mormons have abandoned the faith. And look at what Paul says about those who have done that. Galatians 1:**8-9** *even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* ⁹ *As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed.* Does that mean that if someone offers a different understanding of spiritual gifts that you should regard him as cursed? By no means. He is talking about the gospel again. The Christian essentials, specifically those things pertaining to the way of salvation. And Christian unity, wherever it exists, may be interdenominational, but it will never be inter-faith. Do you see the difference there? My faith is Christian. My denomination is Presbyterian. We can worship together interdenominationally but not inter-faith. It is precisely our common faith that unites us.

Now, let me try to show one practical way we apply this to our attitudes and choices as believers. There are two common mistakes that pastors and churches will make. On the one hand, some will refuse to teach on subjects that are controversial, subjects about which Christians will disagree. They may come up with excuses for why they shun certain topics, but for most the bottom line is that they don’t want to risk upsetting anyone. As a result, our congregations remain ignorant about things to which the Bible does speak - things we need to know. That’s a huge problem. On the other hand, there are some pastors who will teach constantly on those subjects that divide believers, and neglect the core essentials that we do share in common. These pastors feel obligated to continually defend their particular groups’ distinctive positions. Every other sermon is going to be about what makes their group unique and correct. As a conservative, reformed, council of 1647 Presbyterian church there are distinctive doctrines that set us apart from the Baptists and the

Methodists and the Assemblies of God, but my calling is not to always be showing how our church is different from these others. My job is to teach the whole counsel of God with emphasis on the things God emphasizes. And the fact of the matter is, that on the biggest issues of Biblical teaching there is agreement with these other groups. We should not shy away at all from preaching our distinctive beliefs as Presbyterians, but we must recognize that the gospel is not exclusively ours. Listen to this: There was once a Presbyterian group in Scotland called the Cameroonians who in 1742 issued a pamphlet entitled (get this): *The Declaration, Protestation and Testimony of the Suffering Remnant of the Anti-popish, anti-Lutheran, anti-Prelatick, anti-Whitefieldian, anti-Evastian, Anti-sectarian, true Presbyterian Church of Christ in Scotland*. Now, that sounds like a fun crowd, doesn't it? What is wrong with that? They defined themselves not by the gospel, not by the faith, but by what they were against and opposed. I see Paul saying, "Hey, there is a core of gospel faith - that was once for all delivered to us. We share that in common and should find our unity right there."

Now, we must move on to our next bond of unity which is the one baptism. Paul says we are united by a common baptism. And some see this as rather funny since baptism has been a point of such sharp division in the church. Do we baptize by sprinkling or immersion, covenantally or confessionally? Some even believe that water baptism is what makes you into a Christian. How can he say that water baptism unites us? Well, he doesn't. Some fine men will disagree with me, but I honestly don't think the apostle has in view here a baptism of water at all. I have encountered enormous confusion in the church over certain Scriptural passages because every time we hear the word baptism we think of water. But rarely, in Paul's letters, does the word "baptism" refer to water. Remember what John the Baptist said of Jesus: "I baptize you with water, but one is coming who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The important baptism in the New Testament is not with water by the preacher but with the Holy Spirit by the Savior. I Peter 3:**21a** *Baptism now saves you—And lest you be confused about which baptism he is talking about* **21b** *not the removal of dirt from the flesh*. Titus 3 speaks of this saving baptismal work **4-6** *when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared,* ⁵ *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,* ⁶ *whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior*. That term translated as *washing* is a synonym of *baptism*. What kind of baptism is it that saves us? Spirit or water? That's easy. And the same baptism that saves us is the one that unites us as Christians.

Galatians 3:27 *all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* By what baptism are we clothed with Christ? Does a water ritual do that for us? By no means. What baptism joins us with Christ? I Corinthians 12:13 is critical on this issue. Look at this. 13 *by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*13a *by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.* It is this baptism that puts us in the one body, under the one Head, and joins us forever with each other. And what kind of baptism is it? Spiritual.

You will see by this, I expect, that the classic pentecostal doctrine of Holy Spirit baptism is entirely unbiblical. With minimal biblical backing, far too little to outweigh contrary evidence, some have taught that Holy Spirit baptism is a special event occurring in some Christians, normally well after conversion. If that were the case you could never say that Holy Spirit baptism unites us with Christ as I Corinthians 12 and Galatians 3 say. These passages fit perfectly with our text in Ephesians 4. The one baptism, by the Spirit, is the experience of every believer. And if it is the experience of every believer then it must occur when? At conversion. At the time of initial faith. Otherwise you will have true believers walking around for some time without the baptism of the Spirit and rather than seeing it as a point of commonality among Christians it would be a point of contrast. The New Testament teaches however that Holy Spirit baptism is a grace shared by all who believe. In John 7:38 Jesus said 38-39ab *He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'*”³⁹ *But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.*

I think we have enough time to cover verse 6, the last of our seven bonds of unity 6 *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* And what do we call people who have the same father? Family. We are brothers and sisters. When the one Lord, baptized us with the One Spirit into the One body He also gave us this relationship to the One Father. Galatians 4:6 *Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* This is the spirit of prayer - the spirit of sonship. When we pray together what do we say? *Our Father*, and every time we say it it reminds us of our oneness. We are not one like this with everybody. The idea of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man is not a Scriptural notion but a liberal one. Jesus told some men John 8:44a *You are of your father, the devil.* The invitation to God's family is wide open to anyone but the admission to the family is restricted. John 1:12 *as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of*

God, even to those who believe in His name. You see, you can be a child of God. You can enter into the greatest privilege man has ever known, but there is a condition - receiving the Son of God as Lord and Savior. You do that and you join the forever family.

Now, brethren, our unity depends a great deal on how well we remember what God says about us. When we speak to each other, do we remember, as we do that we have one father, that we are one family, that we will be such forever? I figured that if we did three things would be true. First we would value each other. We would be mutually precious. Question: which is most important your biological family or your spiritual family? This may be one of those questions you would like to avoid, but I think it is worth asking. The world, our society, your upbringing all would answer one way and without hesitation. Of course, the bio family is tops. Is that what God says? Hmm. Luke 8 gives us this account about Jesus. **19-21** *His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd.* ²⁰ *And it was reported to Him, "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You."* ²¹ *But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."* No clear answer there, but an indicator of how the Lord Jesus saw the matter. Listen, God says your biological family is an important priority. I would not suggest otherwise, but I would challenge where the family of God comes into your value system. Too few of us really think of our church as a family. As a result it gets very little of our time, very little of our money, very little of our prayers. If that is true of you, you may be missing an important New Testament truth. We are family. We have one father and when you remember that you will value your brothers and sisters.

Secondly, if we remember that we are family we will defend each other. Brothers and sisters can fight viciously with each other, but if an outsider attacks they stand together. That is what we must do for each other. Family defends family. Howard Hendricks says that Christians today fellowship around doughnuts, but the early church didn't need doughnuts. They had something far more powerful drawing them together - persecution. When attacked we tend to forget our petty differences, and our different councils. We care only about our mutual allegiance, our common father and we stand back to back, warrior to warrior. Just so, we need to stand up for each other in the church. Rather than listen to someone badmouth a fellow Christian - speak up on their behalf. Defend them for the Father's sake.

Thirdly, if we remember that we are family we will respect each other. Here's an awesome thought - when we deal with Christians we are dealing with children of the King. I have always told

Christian young men that when they date Christian girls they have to answer to Dad for how they treat her. That is true in all our relationships. How dare we treat as little someone that God calls his own child! You know the story of the prince and the pauper - how when the young lad appeared to be a pauper he was mistreated by many because they failed to see him for what he really was, heir to the throne. Let's not make that mistake. We share one father, one glorious Father who is God - value each other, defend each other, respect each other.

On screen we have a brief statement of unity. A proclamation to ourselves, to the world and to our Father. Would you say it with me. Church, what are you? "We are one body, led by one Spirit, looking to one hope, under one Lord, holding to one faith, sharing one baptism, and united as children of one Father" who is God, over all through all and in all. Let's pray and prepare ourselves to share together in the family meal.