

The Unity of the Spirit Part 1

Pastor George Stahnke, 01/09/2005

Over the next two Sundays I will be speaking from Ephesians 4:1-6. This week we will look at “The Unity of the Spirit.” Next week we will explore “The Bond of Peace.”

Ephesians 4:1 - 6 (NASB) ¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Spiritual unity between believers exists

Romans 12:4 - 5 (NIV) ⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Intellectually, I think we all understand and except the fact that we who follow Christ Jesus make up His body. Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female all who have surrendered their lives to the lordship of Jesus are united together through the Spirit of adoption into one spiritual family. Collectively we are the body of Christ.

Romans 8:15 - 16 (NASB) ¹⁵For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

Galatians 3:26 - 28 (NLT) ²⁶So you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians—you are one in Christ Jesus.

Keep and promote the unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:3a (NIV) ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...

Ephesians 4:3a (NASB) ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit...

Ephesians 4:3a (AMP) Be eager {and} strive earnestly to guard {and} keep the harmony {and} oneness of [and produced by] the Spirit...

G4704 diligent: σπουδάζω *spoudazō* (*spoo-dad'-zo*)

Thayer Definition: 1) to hasten, make haste, 2) to exert one's self, endeavour, give diligence

What every the Spirit authors must be watched over and earnestly promoted. If we are not diligent about our oneness the unity of the Spirit's manifestation will be lost.

When a person joins an organization, he obligates himself to live and act in accordance with the standards of the group. He accepts its aims, objectives, and standards as his own. A citizen is obligated to abide by the laws of his country. An employee is obligated to work according to the rules, standards, and purposes of his company. Members of service clubs obligate themselves to promote the goals of the club and to abide by its standards. When someone joins an athletic team he is obligated to play as the coach orders and according to the rules of the sport. Human society could not operate without such obligation.

—MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Ephesians

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Romans 8:12 - 16 (NIV) ¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

It is not enough to know intellectually that all Christians are one in the Spirit. It must be lived out in such a way that it is vividly demonstrated to the world.

John 17:18 - 23 (NASB) ¹⁸“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.

There have always been differences within the church. Presbyterians have their distinctives, Baptists theirs. Calvinists disagree with Armenians. Some appreciate formal worship; some ask only for a small room where a few can sit in silence and listen to the voice within. Today some hesitate to link hands with anyone who fails to speak in tongues, while others draw back from any who do. More recently, some have insisted that we view the doctrine of inerrancy—that the Bible as originally written contained no errors—as the criteria to divide the “true evangelical” from the false. And yet we hear Paul say, the church is one. And we wonder. If we are one, why does division mark us instead of unity? A number of answers have been suggested. Here are a few.

- *Unity is only spiritual.* “The invisible church is one, but the visible church, made up of human beings, will always fall short of unity.”
- *Organism vs. organization.* “A true bond exists (and can be affirmed, among believers) but this bond need not be expressed in any kind of organizational union.”
- *Local unity.* “The only true expression of the church on earth is found in local congregations. Thus the oneness of the local body is all that was ever intended.”
- *True church.* “All others outside our group who claim to be Christians are deceived. Since we define all who are unlike us as out of the body, it’s easy to claim that unity exists—right here among us.”

Each of these, and other formulations, are honest attempts to deal with a difficult question. Yet each falls short of Scripture’s affirmation of our oneness as body, family, and temple of God.

—The Teacher’s Commentary

Ephesians 2:11 - 22 (NIV) ¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

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“There is one body and one Spirit” Everything Paul wrote in this letter was based on the conviction that the body of Christ is one. “One Lord, one faith, one [Spirit] baptism, one God and Father of all”. Our lives also must express this conviction. And the way we express it is by affirming our love for other believers—even for those with whom we differ.

Paul reminds us, “Be completely humble and gentle.” Christians do differ, and differ on important matters. If we focus on our differences, convinced as we are that we are right and the others are wrong, we will become proud and judgmental. Only a humble spirit will free us to love without feeling the need to debate our differences. Only a humble spirit will maintain the bond of peace.

Don’t be proud. No matter how doctrinally correct you may be, if your attitude denies the oneness of the body of Christ, you are wrong.

—The 365-Day Devotional Commentary

Psalms 133:1 - 3 (NASB) ¹Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! ² It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, *Even Aaron’s beard*, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. ³ It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever.