

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT



by R. B. Shiflet

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Introduction

One of the burning issues of this generation is the renewed interest throughout Christendom in Christian union. Not since the days of the Reformers has there been such widespread interest in having all believers in “one fold” through organic union of the various denominations. Many Protestant denominations have long talked in terms of the “ecumenical movement” with various plans to make this union a reality. More recently, the Roman Church has shown great interest in such a movement.

While most Christians deplore the schisms in Christendom, many see great dangers in these attempts to bring organic union. In fact, most attempts at merging two denominations have resulted in three groups rather than the two with which the merger began. A recent example serves to illustrate this. The Congregational Christian Churches merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Churches to form the United Church of Christ. There were many Congregational Christian Churches, however, that would not enter the new organization. Many Evangelical and Reformed Churches, too, refused to enter. Thus, we still have Congregational Christian Churches, and Evangelical and Reformed Churches, in addition to the new United Church of Christ.

This study does not deal with organic union of church organizations; rather, it attempts to point believers in Christ to the UNITY already made by the Holy Spirit and our responsibility to recognize and to keep that unity in its sevenfold revelation.

The study will be divided into three major areas:

- I. Pre-requisites for the Unity Given by the Spirit
- II. Practical Applications of the Unity of the Spirit
- III. Products of the Unity of the Spirit

I. Pre-Requisites for the Unity Given by the Spirit

Unfortunately, many attempts on the part of believers to keep the unity of the Spirit fail because they have begun Ephesians 4 with the 3rd verse rather than the 1st. Efforts have often been made to force the truth upon those who are not ready for it, or to fight spiritual battles in the energy of the flesh. Let us note some of the requirements that God lays down as being necessary before we can keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A. A Meritorious Walk (Ephesians 4:1)

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” The Apostle Paul, introducing himself as “the prisoner of the Lord,” implores believers to live daily lives that will be on the same level with their high calling. The word “worthy,” used by the Apostle here, suggests a proper balance. It is a word used of scales that weigh by balancing weights with the object weighed. Thus, he asks that our daily Christian walk balance in weight the high calling that is ours. He suggests further in the letter that this be:

1. A Walk in Love (Ephesians 5:2)
2. A Walk as Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8)
3. A Walk of Cautiousness (Ephesians 5:15)

B. A Meek Spirit (Ephesians 4:2)

The world ridicules a meek spirit. One who is meek and lowly is often referred to as a “Mr. Milquetoast” and is seldom appreciated by his fellow man. Yet our Lord described Himself as “meek and lowly in heart”. The Apostle Paul admonishes us in this passage that before we are ready to keep the unity of the Spirit, we must practice “all lowliness and meekness.” How many testimonies for the truth have been hindered by a failure on our part to obey

this exhortation! So many servants of the Lord who, by His grace, have seen the truth of the one body, the distinctive ministry of the Apostle Paul, our completeness in Christ, and kindred truths, have developed spiritual pride, have failed to give the truth in meekness and lowliness, and have closed doors of service that might have led to fruitful ministries had the message been given in love and meekness. May the Lord give us daily the grace to remember:

*Naught have I gotten, but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it, since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase
I'm only a sinner, saved by grace!*

—Dr. James M. Gray

C. A Mutual Forbearance (Ephesians 4:2)

In addition to a worthy walk and a meek spirit, the believers who desire to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace must bear with one another in love. Most of the time God's people can enjoy sweet fellowship with each other. Occasionally, however, the old natures clash in discord. When this is about to happen, we are warned to “forbear one another in love”—literally, to “put up with one another in love.”

Only those who are walking worthily, meekly, and forbearingly are ready to seek diligently to keep this unity of the Spirit.

II. Practical Applications of the Unity of the Spirit

The actual unity of the Spirit is displayed in seven wonderful “ones”. Those who recognize and practice these ones and who are walking in the light of verses 1-3 of Ephesians 4, are endeavoring or striving to keep the Spirit's unity. This unity is broken any time we try to recognize or practice two when

God has declared there is one for this dispensation. Let us examine these seven ones in the light of the Word.

A. There is One Body (Ephesians 4:4)

This is, of course, “the body, the Church” (Colossians 1:18); it is “the church which is His body” (Ephesians 1:22, 23). This church is not an organization that men can join; it is an organism to which God adds all believers. Let us consider:

1. The Membership of this Body

The Church which is the Body of Christ is the only church that God is building today. At one time, He was building the “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38) in His dealings with His people Israel under the Law. There was a Jewish “church” at Pentecost, in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. There will be a company called out during the future Tribulation, associated with the New Jerusalem. None of these, however, is called “the church which is His body,” or “the body of Christ”. Every true Christian on earth today is a member of the body of Christ, regardless of what denomination he may have joined. The body, of Christ is made up of all Christians, but only Christians. The Lord adds believers to His church and seals them in that body (Ephesians 4:30). It is a living organism that He is building.

Are you keeping the unity of the Spirit by being identified only as a member of His “one body”?

2. The Mission of this Body

- a. To preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8). This, of course, includes preaching the gospel. God has placed

evangelists in the body for this purpose. We must preach the gospel of the grace of God. “By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast”; this must ever be the message of the church to the world.

- b. To commit the pattern of sound words given to Paul to faithful men, capable of teaching others. God has placed pastors and teachers in the body with this ministry, for the purpose of perfecting the saints unto the work of the ministry, for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

3. The Mystery of this Body

One of the most precious truths in the Word—yet one of the least understood—is the fact that all of the truth concerning the church which is the body of Christ, its membership, its position, its hope, and its calling, was a mystery, a sacred secret, hidden in God from before the foundation of the world, but revealed directly by the risen Christ to the Apostle Paul. In other words, God used the Apostle Paul to begin a new dispensation. The reader may search in vain for a reference to the body of Christ from Genesis to Malachi. Christ did not tell this secret during His earthly ministry. Peter and the eleven knew nothing about this special revelation until Peter learned it from the Apostle Paul. (See II Peter 3:15-18).

Let the reader to whom this sounds like “strange things” read carefully Ephesians 3:1-10, noting especially verses 4 to 9, and Colossians 1:18-29, noting especially verses 24 to 29. Accepting this truth with all its implications will free the believer from the chains of tradition, the confines of sectarianism, the curse of liberalism, and the claims of wildfire emotionalism.

B. There is One Spirit (Ephesians 4:4)

While it is common practice to break the unity of the Spirit by recognizing sectarian organizations instead of or in addition to the one body, it would be most unusual to find any who did not confess that the “one Spirit” is the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).

1. The Witness of the Spirit

a. In Convicting (John 16:8-11)

It is the Holy Spirit that reproves the sinner, convicts him of his sins, and points him to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation.

b. In Convincing (Romans 8:16)

It is also the work of the Holy Spirit to convince or bring assurance to the believer that he has eternal life. He does this primarily through the Word (I John 5:11-13).

2. The Workings of the Spirit

Obviously, the workings of the Holy Spirit are far too numerous to consider in a study such as this. We mention only one or two, with the hope that any who desire to search further into this field may make use of a good concordance to do so.

a. In Preserving the Believer (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30)

b. In Praying for and through the Believer (Ephesians 2:18; Romans 8:26)

c. In Producing Fruit in the Believer (Ephesians 5:9; Galatians 5:22)

3. The Warfare of the Spirit

The sixth chapter of Ephesians calls attention to our warfare as Christian soldiers. The only weapon given to us in this spiritual warfare is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

C. There is One Hope of Your Calling (Ephesians 4:4)

God has given a hope to each family of saints with whom He has dealt. Pastor Charles H. Welch, of London, England, in his excellent book, *The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner*, calls attention to the dimensions by which God measures these hopes. His earthly people Israel were given an earthly hope — that one day the LAND would be theirs. This hope was measured in terms of length and breadth (Genesis 13: 14-17). “... For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.... Arise, walk through the land in the length and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.” This hope awaits future fulfillment.

The company of saints referred to in the Scripture as the bride, the Lamb's wife, have as their hope the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. Note its dimensions in Revelation 20:16: “The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

The hope of members of the body of Christ, which is “Christ in you the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) is associated with our being manifested with Him in the glory, at His appearing (Colossians 3:1-4). It is spoken of by the Apostle Paul as “that Blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing (literally, “appearing in glory”) of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

Concerning our unique hope and calling, the Apostle prays that we “may be able to comprehend with all saints

what is the breadth and length and depth and height (Ephesians 3:18).

This one hope of the body of Christ may be described as follows:

1. It is a Super-Heavenly Hope.

The hope associated with our calling as members of the one body of Christ is the hope of appearing with Him in the glory, “far above all” (Ephesians 1:20-21; 4:10).

2. It is a Solacing Hope.

It is a solacing hope, a blessed hope (Titus 2:13); a comforting hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

3. It is a Sanctifying Hope.

The hope of our Lord's appearing and our manifestation is also a purifying or sanctifying hope. It seems that regardless of the company of saints with which Scripture deals, the doctrine of Christ's appearing or of His return carry with them the result of cleaner Christian living. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:11-13). By application, we get the same truth in I John 3:3, “And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as He is pure.”

D. There is One Lord

While the term “Lord” is applied to both the Father and the Son, there is no doubt that the “one Lord” of this pas-

sage is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, for God the Father is mentioned in verse 6. The word commonly translated “Lord” (kurios) occurs hundreds of times in the Scriptures, and an exhaustive study of its usage is far beyond the scope of this study. We shall consider three broad uses of the word in the epistle to the Ephesians. They are indicative of the way the Apostle Paul used the term in all of his epistles. He presented this “one Lord” as

1. The Object of our Faith (Ephesians 1:5)

It is not mere faith in the man Christ Jesus that is needful, but faith in the Lord. The Lord is:

a. Our Maker,

for “all things were made by Him” (John 1:3), “by Him were all things created” (Colossians 1:16).

This is true of the material universe and of the new creation. Someone has called attention to the fact that the word translated “workmanship” in Ephesians 2:10 (poiema) is found only twice in all the Bible. In Ephesians 2:10, it applies to the new creation that we are in Christ Jesus—“His Workmanship.” The other occurrence is in Romans 1:20, where it is translated “the things that are made”—referring to the great universe that our Lord has created. Do you see the great truth that this calls to our attention? It would be for him to create the heavens and the earth! Both the physical creation and the new creation are “His Workmanship,” literally, “God's Poem.” Thus we bow in faith before the “one Lord” as our Maker.

b. Our Master (Ephesians 6:9).

The One Lord is our owner, our master, not only by virtue of creation, but by redemption as well. “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.” (I Cor. 6:19-20). Therefore, we are to yield ourselves to our Master in heaven and, like the Apostle Paul, gladly acknowledge ourselves as bond-slaves to Him.

c. Our Mediator (I Timothy 2:5).

Fortunately, our Lord and Master is also our “go-between.” Faith in this Lord recognizes Him as the “One Mediator between God and men.” He is the Daysman for whom Job longed, the Kinsman-Redeemer portrayed in the Book of Ruth, and the Mercy-Seat or Propitiation through whom sinners may approach the Holy God.

2. The Object of our Love (Ephesians 6:24)

We serve the Lord because we love Him. We recognize His ownership, we acknowledge His right to our allegiance, and we see in Him One worthy of our worship. We render reverence unto Him, but our service is based on love. We do not cringe before Him as we would before a cruel taskmaster, for both the Word of truth and our own experience have taught us that His way is best for us. Therefore, because we love our one Lord, we attempt to do that which is acceptable in His sight (Ephesians 5:10).

3. The Object of our Worship (Ephesians 5:19)

The hymns and spiritual songs that are sung in our meetings should be designed to bring praise to our Lord. So many of the modern songs used in many as-

semblies are subjective, relating to human experience rather than offering worship and praise to the Lord. The entire service—praise, prayer and preaching—must be in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17)

E. There is One Faith

The term “faith” as used in the Scriptures by the Apostle Paul may mean confidence in God, as is true in Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5:1 and other references; it may mean the doctrine of God, or the entire revelation of Scripture (I Timothy 3:9, 4:1, 5:8, etc.); it may even mean the faithfulness of God, as is the obvious intent of Romans 3:3; in some passages, it seems to be used as almost an equivalent of the name of Christ (see Galatians 3:23, 25).

Obviously, the term “faith” as used in Ephesians 4:5, the “one faith,” refers to the entire revelation of truth which God has given by inspiration—“the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20)—His faithfulness toward us in the revelation of truth. How far we err when we talk of a Jewish faith, a Catholic faith, and a Protestant faith! How we show our lack of knowledge of the Word when we speak of “a church where people of all faiths meet.” There is but one faith. It is not a Baptist faith, a Methodist faith, or a Presbyterian faith. It is not an Independent faith, an Undenominational faith, or an Interdenominational faith. It is the faith once for all delivered unto the saints. Our part is to:

1. Keep the Faith (II Timothy 4:7)

The Apostle Paul closed his testimony with the statement, “I have kept the faith.” The word “tereo,” which is translated “kept” is defined by Thayer as follows: “to take care of; to attend carefully; to guard; to hold firmly; to keep; not to leave.” In the age in which we live when so many attacks have been made upon the

faith, the revelation or doctrine of God, it is of utmost importance that we take care of it, that we attend it carefully, guard it, and hold it firmly. The word is the same one that Paul used when he told us in Ephesians 4:3 to “keep” the unity of the Spirit.

2. Contend for the Faith (Jude 3)

There is no doubt that the word “contend” implies a struggle, a defense. Perhaps light may be shed upon the significance of the word if we quote a portion of Jude 3 from some of the translations available today. May the reader note the verse carefully in the Authorized or King James version, and then compare it with the following excerpts from other translations. The expression earnestly contend for” in Jude 3 is translated “carry on a vigorous defense of” in the Williams translation. Godbey translates it, “agonize for”; the Twentieth Century version translates it “fight in the defense of”; Phillips gives us “put up a real fight for”. Weymouth renders it “vigorous defense of”, while the New English Bible urges that we “join in the struggle in defense of the faith.” While these translations are all in harmony, they call to our attention the various shades of meaning of the word “earnestly contend.”

It has long been the conviction of the writer that one of the most difficult duties of the believer is to contend without being contentious. Most of us are extremists by nature, and we tend toward the extreme of a shallow, compromising, standing-for-nothing attitude on the one hand, or an egotistical, Pharisaical, self-appointed-reformer-of-everyone-else, on the other hand. Some have become so “broad-minded” that they have no depth in anything. Others have become so narrow and bigoted that their attitude would turn the earnest seeker away from any truth they might have to offer. One extreme stresses love, with no thought for

truth, while the other speaks of truth in words that show nothing but hatred for all who disagree with them.

Two verses will serve to challenge us to our duty in contending for the faith. One comes from the pen of the Apostle, the Preacher and Teacher of the Gentiles, in Ephesians 4:15, where we are urged to speak the truth in love. May the reader ponder the tremendous responsibility. We must always speak the truth (and this is a title for both the Written Word and the Living Word, see John 17:17 and John 14:6), no matter how it may hurt or offend. Yet we must not speak the truth in bitterness, in spiritual pride, or even in anger. We must speak the truth in love. We must earnestly contend for the faith with spiritual weapons, namely the sword of the spirit, not in the energy of the flesh.

The other passage that offers counsel as to how we are to contend for the faith is found in I Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always -to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” We are to be ready to give an answer, under any circumstances. Yet our answer is to be given in meekness and reverential fear—not in haughtiness and pontifical pride.

It is perhaps a commentary on man's depravity that the word which Peter used by inspiration that is translated “give an answer,” or more literally “defend” is the word “apologia,” which once meant “to make a vigorous defense of,” and has degenerated to mean, “make excuses for.” In 1611 and earlier, an apology meant a strong stand in defense of a truth; in 1962, it means a feeble excuse for something one has done. Unfortunately, many messages from pulpits today sound like excuses for using the Bible; few indeed are the strong

defenses of the faith!

3. Comfort Concerning the Faith (I Thessalonians 3:2)

To speak of comforting Christians concerning the faith is another precious heritage the church has almost lost. When we speak of the hope that is before us, we are looked upon as being “too other-worldly.” The Marxist philosophy that Christianity has not been concerned with things of this life, but has only promised “pie in the sky” to its adherents to keep them satisfied with their lot below has caused too many religious leaders to leave the individual gospel of grace in favor of a “social gospel” of political and economic reforms. This has frequently played into the hands of socialists and communists, who have used religion to peddle their wares.

But the believer who knows the Word finds comfort (and don't forget that the word “comfort” is closely related to “fortitude” or “courage” in the faith.

F. There is One Baptism (Ephesians 4:5)

It is on this point that we most often break the unity of the Spirit and fail most miserably in keeping that unity in the bond of peace. Believers have for centuries been hopelessly divided on the question of baptism; there are differences as to the proper mode, the proper purpose, the proper subject, and the proper authority. Some immerse, some sprinkle, and some practice effusion. Most denominations use some adaptation of the formula of Matthew 28:19, “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost” (which none of the Apostles ever used as far as the Acts record is concerned); others use the formula of Acts 2:38, “in the name of Jesus Christ.” Some immersionists are satisfied to place the candidate under the water but once; others practice “trine immersion,” once for each

member of the Godhead.

Many groups insist that the purpose of baptism with or in water is the remission of sins. Of these groups, some, such as the Roman Catholics, believe that sins are remitted when the water is sprinkled upon the candidate, whether he be infant or adult. Others, such as the churches of Christ, believe the sins are forgiven only if the candidate is an accountable believer who has repented of his sins and confessed his faith in Christ. The baptism, in order to be valid, must, according to them, be complete immersion with both the baptizer and the baptized in the water. The Greek Orthodox church practices immersion, but they immerse babies as well as adults. Baptists, on the other hand, insist that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation. To them, it is a witness to the world, or a door to the visible church organization. Mark 16, which is used so frequently as a proof text by members of the church of Christ, “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” is interpreted by Baptists and others to mean, “he that believeth and is saved should be baptized.” It is interesting to note that the remainder of Mark 16 promises miraculous healings, speaking with tongues, and other signs as proof of salvation. If our marching orders for today are found in Mark 16, where are the signs?

Views are just as diversified on the proper subject and the proper authority for water baptism as they are on the proper mode and proper purpose. The examples of our differences, cited above, are given objectively, not to criticize or to stress our divisions, but to call attention to the great need that we face—a need to go back to the Bible and reevaluate its message on baptism. We have seen in previous articles that God would have us recognize only one body, the church; only one Spirit, the Holy Spirit; only one hope, the blessed hope of His appearing; only one Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ; one faith, the faith of the Son of God. There is just as surely one baptism. Since

there are so many differences on this subject, we must approach it with humility and reverence, trying in a spirit of love to find God's truth for His church of this dispensation, the Body of Christ. Let us note some of the baptisms recognized in the Scriptures at different times. President Charles F. Baker, of the Grace Bible College of Grand Rapids, in his valuable booklet, REAL BAPTISM, identifies twelve various baptisms in the Word. They are: (1) Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:4, 5; 11:15, 16); (2) The Holy Spirit baptizing into the Body of Christ (Colossians 2:11, 12; Romans 6:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 12:13); (3) Death baptism (Luke 12:50, Matthew 20:22, 23; Mark 10:38); (4) Fire baptism (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16); (5) The typical baptism of Noah's ark (I Peter 3:13-21). Note that the occupants of the ark did not get wet); (6) Baptism for the dead (I Corinthians 15:29); (7) Baptism into Moses (I Corinthians 10:2. Note again, these who were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" went across on "dry ground" according to the Exodus account; their baptism was apart from water); (8) Divers baptisms of the law (Hebrews 9:10; John 1:25); (9) Traditional Jewish baptisms (Mark 7:1-9); (10) John's baptism of Israel for the remission of sins (Matthew 3:6-16, Mark 1:4-9, Luke 3:3-21, John 1:25-23, etc.); (11) Christ's baptism by John to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:14), etc.); and (12) Pentecostal baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, etc.).

While it is beyond the scope of this limited study to enter an exposition of all of these baptisms of Scripture, the interested reader is urged to search these passages carefully and note how few of these twelve baptisms could possibly be water. This will impress upon honest minds the truth that baptism is not always synonymous with water. The aim of this study is to determine which is the one baptism for the body of Christ today. Many of the above baptisms are eliminated because they obviously pertain to other dispensations. We shall limit our searching to truth that has

come to us since Calvary.

1. Time of Two Baptisms

(The Early Acts Period; Peter's Ministry to Israel)

When Peter preached his Pentecostal sermon, as recorded in Acts, chapter 2, he addressed it to Israelites (2:36). When these men of Israel were convicted of their sins and asked what they could do to be saved, Peter's reply was, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). If language means anything, this was a baptism with water that was required for the remission of their sins. This was in perfect harmony with the commission given to Peter and the eleven in Mark 16:16. Upon receipt of this water baptism, they experienced the baptism of the Holy Ghost promised by John the Baptist: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance ... He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." (Matthew 3:11). Christ was the baptizer; the Holy Spirit was the "element." The signs promised in Mark 16:17, 18 followed! Read any chapter in Acts to see these signs. This pattern of two baptisms characterized the ministry of the eleven to the Jews. In fact, when the believers were scattered after the stoning of Stephen, they went everywhere preaching the Word "to none but unto the Jews only." (Acts 11:19).

2. Two Baptisms Reversed

(Later Acts Ministry)

In Acts 10, we find a most unusual account. The Apostle Peter, who received the commission of Mark 16 to "preach the gospel to every creature," had never preached to anyone but the Jews. God gave a miraculous threefold vision to him to persuade him to go to the house of a God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius, a man

who was earnestly seeking truth. But when Peter reluctantly went to this Gentile's house, he did not give him an invitation to salvation. On the contrary, he made apologies for entering the home of a Gentile, and rehearsed the blessings of God to Israel. As he was in the midst of this, he said, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This was the message Cornelius was waiting to hear! As soon as they heard this message, Cornelius and those Gentiles with him believed it and were baptized with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with tongues! Peter then remembered the words of the Lord (see Acts 11:15, 16) and identified this experience of Cornelius and his household as the baptism with the Holy Ghost promised by Christ. He then required them to be baptized with water. This was still two baptisms, but this time the baptism with the Holy Spirit was first, followed by baptism with water! This seems to be the pattern during the remainder of the book of Acts. See, for example, the experience of the Philippian jailer, recorded in Acts 16.

3. Two Baptisms Replaced by One (*Paul's Post-Acts Ministry*)

As long as God dealt with Israel as a nation, he continued the sign program, for "the Jews require a sign" (I Corinthians 1:22). In the very last chapter of Acts, miracles are recorded. The last account of water baptism in the Bible occurs in Acts 19, and the same believers who were baptized, spoke with tongues. Paul, as well as Peter, practiced water baptism during this period, but he baptized only a few and thanked God that he had baptized no more, "for," said he, "Christ sent me NOT TO BAPTIZE BUT TO PREACH THE GOSPEL" (I Corinthians 1:17). Had Israel been willing, as a nation, to accept the Messiah, the commission

of Mark 16 would have been used by these believing Jews to reach every creature, beginning at Jerusalem, extending to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the world. Christ would have returned in the lifetime of that generation, according to the promise made in Acts 3:19-21, a promise conditioned on Israel's conversion.

But the Jews rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Just as their fathers rejected God the Father, they rejected the Son in His earthly ministry, and they rejected the Holy Spirit. Stephen made this plain in his sermon: "ye do always resist the Holy Ghost;" as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which sheaved before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers." (Acts 7:51, 52). In I Thessalonians 2:15, 16, the Apostle Paul charged his nation with this same three-fold sin, but he added another, "forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

With the close of the book of Acts the Apostle Paul pronounced this divine judgment upon the nation Israel and turned to the Gentiles (Acts 28:25-28). From that time forth in his ministry, as a prisoner of God for the Gentiles, he never gave Israel priority; he never performed a miracle or a sign (on the contrary, he left a fellow worker sick and prescribed medicine for young Timothy; see II Timothy 4:20 and I Timothy 5:23); he never engaged in external rituals or ordinances; and he preached only ONE BAPTISM, the work of the Holy Spirit that identifies or baptizes the believer into the very death of Christ (see Romans 6:3, 4 with Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:11, 12).

This act of the Holy Spirit (the Baptizer) baptizing the believer into the death of Christ (the “element”) and thus so identifying the believer with his Lord as to make him a member of the body of Christ, takes place the moment one believes the gospel of the grace of God; this is the ONE BAPTISM for today. (Note Ephesians 4:5 with I Corinthians 12:13). It is an operation of God, not of man (Colossians 2:11, 12). Thus, we stand complete in Christ, apart from the works of men, either our own or another's. This one baptism that identifies us with Christ as members of His body was a part of a revelation received by the Apostle Paul, which he calls “the mystery”—a sacred secret that had been kept hidden in God from before the foundation of the world, never made known to men of other ages. See Ephesians 3:1-10; Colossians 1:25-29. I Corinthians itself is, of course, a transitional book, written during the Acts period. It told its readers clearly that the sign program was to cease (I Corinthians 13:8-11). It told them that while Paul had baptized a few and spoke with tongues more than all of them, he was not sent to baptize (I Corinthians 1:17) and tongues would cease (13:8). Peter could never have made this statement, for he was sent to baptize with water (Mark 16:16).

May God use this study to cause the earnest believer to search diligently.

While we steadfastly maintain that the Scriptures are our sole authority in this as in other matters, and we do not base any doctrine on church history, we find many Christians who are disturbed because they feel that the doctrine of the one baptism, a Spirit baptism apart from water, is a 19th or 20th century innovation with none of the earlier believers holding such teaching. We are mindful that not only this truth, but many other truths of the Scripture were corrupted and lost, even in the first and second centuries.

But our hearts are warmed as we find on the pages of church history a group of believers who were very active in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean area some one thousand years before Martin Luther's reformation, who preached and practiced completeness in Christ, and stressed the one baptism of the Spirit, with no water baptism. They preferred to be called "Christians" only, but they emphasized the ministry of Paul so much that their enemies called them "Paulicians." The Quakers, or Society of Friends, have from their beginning preached the one baptism of the Spirit. Roger Williams, who was for a number of years a Baptist evangelist and who may have established the first Baptist church in America in Rhode Island during colonial times, in his later years left all denominations and became what he called a "seeker" for truth; he gave up water baptism and preached this one baptism. These cases are cited only as proof that many of God's children down through the history of Christianity have maintained this position.

G. There is One God and Father of All (Ephesians 4:6)

There is no doubt of the One to Whom this refers. He is The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory (Ephesians 1:17). THE COMPANION BIBLE directs our attention to the fact that in Romans 15, He is revealed to us as

1. The God of Patience and Comfort (Romans 15:5).

It is most interesting to note that Romans 15:4 points us to the Scriptures for patience and comfort (or consolation, the same word). Immediately thereafter, in verse 5, we are pointed to God as "the God of patience and comfort". Our Heavenly Father, the Author of the Book, is the God of Patience and Comfort. We, His children, find this patience and comfort in the Word. The word "patience" is a word that means endurance.

It is made up, in the Greek language, of a word that means “to remain, or abide,” with a prefix that means “under”, or “behind”; hence, patience is the ability to be calm when one is left behind. The word “consolation” or “comfort” is a form of the word used to describe the Holy Spirit (Comforter, John 14:26, 15:26); it is used to describe the Son (Advocate, I John 2:1); here it is used to describe the Father. The word, broken into its parts, means “one called alongside another to help, comfort, encourage, plead with, beseech, etc.” What a picture this suggests of the one God! He is the One who stands ready to offer patient endurance to His child when the child is tempted. He is the One Who, with His Son and the Holy Spirit operates as the Perfect Paraclete, our Comforter, Advocate, Attorney.

2. The God of Hope (Romans 15:13)

This title of God is in contrast with the hopeless gods of the heathen. Isaiah ridicules the pagan idol by showing us that it is made from the remains of a tree that has been cut down. Part of the tree was used by our Gentile forefather to make a fire to warm himself; part of it was used for a fire to cook his food; the remainder was used to fashion a god for him to worship. How different is the God of Hope, Maker of Heaven and earth, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He it is Who fills His children with all joy and peace in believing. He it is Who makes us abound in hope. Hope, as used in the Scriptures, is a much stronger word than we think of when we use it. To us, hope is almost synonymous with wish; the word used in the Scriptures is closely related to faith.

3. The God of Peace (Romans 15:33).

The word peace, as used in the original tongue, meant “a joining together”. Surely this is most significant in

the light of God's plan to join man unto Himself. He it is Who reconciled us. He is the One Who, in the person of His Son, made peace at Calvary. In the work of the cross, Jew and Gentile were made into one new man, so making peace. Christ our Lord not only made peace: He preached peace. He is our peace. Sinners though we were by nature and practice, we have been joined to Christ as members of His body. We who know the truth of the mystery, the body of Christ, can perhaps more fully appreciate the significance of the title, "The God of Peace."

III. The Products of the Unity of the Spirit

Having considered the pre-requisites for the unity of the Spirit: a worthy walk, sweet spirit toward fellow believers, and a faithful forbearance of one another; and having pondered the practical applications of the seven wonderful ones of Ephesians 4:4-6, we are ready to meditate upon the products of the unity of the Spirit. What is produced by keeping the unity of the Spirit? What is the result?

We shall note a few results as given to us in the remainder of Ephesians 4.

A. Gifts for the Church Appropriated

In Ephesians 4:11-14, we read: "And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ..."

The risen and exalted Head of the Body of Christ gave gifts to His church. The apostles and prophets were foundational (Ephesians 2:20). They were used in writing the

Scripture and were operative until the Word of God was complete. The other gifts to the body, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, remain. God places these in the body on the basis of His foreknowledge and grace, not on the basis of our faithfulness. His reason for placing them, however, is His desire that they might perfect the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. Even though the gifts are operating in the body, the body does not receive full benefit unless the unity of the Spirit is kept. Those saints who are endeavoring' to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace are going to receive the most benefit from the work of pastors and teachers. They are going to be the most fruitful in the work of the ministry.

B. Ground for Stability Achieved

Ephesians 4:14 promises stability to those who, having kept the unity of the Spirit, have benefited from the evangelists, pastors, and teachers, and are engaged in the work of the ministry. Such saints are no longer victims of every cult and religious fad. They are not tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. They have seen their position in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, citizens of heaven, one with all other members of the body, and it has stabilized them. The Apostle Paul promised stability to all who followed his gospel, “the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” (Romans 16:25). We shall be grounded in the truth in direct relationship to our knowledge of the mystery and our endeavor to keep the precious unity of the Spirit.

C. Growth of the Body Assured

A third result of the keeping of the unity of the Spirit is growth. “That we may grow up in Him” is the goal. In a day when so much emphasis is placed on growth and increase in number in the various church organizations, we

would do well to note what the Word says about growth. Men have devised schemes and campaigns, systems and committees, slogans and censuses; God has said growth that is real must come through SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE (Ephesians: 4:15). When the whole body is fitly joined together, keeping the unity of the Spirit, yielding to the Word as it is given by pastors and teachers, growth will take place. If believers today would give up religion and follow only the righteousness of Christ; if they would leave off churchanity and practice Christianity; if they would lay aside traditions of men for the truth of the Word; if they would cease from their efforts at union of organizations and surrender to God's plea to keep the unity of the organism that the Spirit has already made—if these things would happen—what growth the body of Christ would see!

While this may sound like wishful thinking, each believer is responsible to God for doing his part to KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT. We have arrived on the scene late in the history of the church. We had little or nothing to do in causing the divisions. The denominations were already on the scene when we arrived. Many have thus concluded that our duty is to “join the church of our choice” and work as best we can within the framework of that particular denomination. God has not so ordered. We stand complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). Why try to add to this completeness by joining some man-made organization? We are members of the body of Christ by virtue of the one baptism. Why submit to water ceremonies that were just as Israelitish as circumcision and animal sacrifices? (See Colossians 2:11-12).

Our responsibility is to keep this unity by taking our place outside the camp of organized Christendom. The Hebrews were told to go unto Christ outside the camp, bearing His reproach (Hebrews 13:13); the Corinthians were warned against being yoked together with unbelievers and were urged to “come out from among them” (II Corinthians 6:14-18). We cannot change church history, but we can each do his part to keep the unity of

the Spirit by having one and only one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father. When we claim or practice more than one of any of these, we have broken the unity. This blessed unity can be kept only when we take our stand in love for all who know and love our Lord Jesus, and seek His guidance in a spirit of meekness and reverence.