

“Unity: Essential Doctrine”

Ephesians 4:4-6

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Four Lakes Church of Christ



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Introduction:

Several years ago, our family fell in love with the board game TriBond, **▶▶PPT▶▶** a game that was developed and printed by company down in Beloit, Wisconsin. If you have ever played TriBond, then you know that the game is based on the question: What do these three have in common? And so, for example, **▶▶PPT▶▶** the card will give three words: Florida, locksmith, and piano, and you have to figure out what those three things have in common. And the obvious answer is **“keys.”** Florida has the Keys, a locksmith has keys, and a piano has keys. Another question **▶▶PPT▶▶** gives the three words: tree, car, and elephant. What do those three things have in common? And of course, all three have **“trunks.”** A tree has a trunk, a car has a trunk, and an elephant has a trunk. And so the name of the game is TriBond—you are looking for the bond that all three words have in common. This morning, as we go back to our two-part series on unity, I would like to offer ***a reminder from the word of God concerning the shared bond that all of us as Christians have in common.***

I hope that all of us will agree that God wants His church to be unified. We remember the prayer that Jesus offered to God on the night before He died. You might remember that Jesus prayed that his followers would be **“one.”** And yet as we look at the world around us, **▶▶PPT▶▶** we obviously have a huge problem. History tells us that through the years, since the church began, hundreds and thousands of groups have claimed to be the one true church. And so we can look around us today, and we can see the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Church, the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and hundreds upon thousands of others. Just here in Madison, as best as I can tell, we have at least 400 different religious groups advertised in the Yellow Pages alone.

Some have looked at this situation and have suggested that we simply **“agree to disagree,”** that we **“celebrate diversity,”** that we just accept one another, that we just accept the fact that we will never really be united in doctrine, but that we just go ahead and fellowship with one another anyway. Many people have taken this route to unity. Even some in the Lord’s church have gone so far as to swap pulpits with denominational ministers—they will hold joint worship services with denominational groups. When the meetings are over, though, everyone goes back to the way things were, and no permanent good is accomplished. Earlier this week, I read a statement on compromise in general, and it certainly applies to our study here this morning, **“When good compromises with evil, the good only gets worse.”** And those would certainly be my thoughts on this subject as well. There must be a better way.

God did not intend for there to be 400 religious groups here in Madison, all teaching something different.

If you were with us last week, you might remember that we looked together at **Ephesians 4:1-3**. **»PPT»** We discovered that Paul's emphasis in those first three verses was on the attitude we need to have—those attitudes that are essential for Christian unity. We considered the challenge with the old saying, ***“To dwell above with saints we love, O that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, well, that's another story.”*** And we jumped in with the opening words of **Ephesians 4**, ***“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”***

I did not explain it last week, but the picture on the wall was taken at Beaver Creek Bible Camp this past summer. On at least one morning each year, we participate in several team-building activities. And the activity pictured on the wall involves each camper making it through a giant spider web made basically out of bungee cords. Once someone crosses over through a hole, that hole is closed—so it takes a little bit of planning and cooperation—a bit of unity—for everyone to make it from one side to the other. I just thought I should explain that. But the idea from the first three verses of **Ephesians 4** is that we as Christians need to have several basic attitudes before unity is even possible.

- We are to walk in humility—that is, we are to look at others as being more important than ourselves.
- We are to walk in gentleness—that is, we are to keep our power under control.
- We are to practice patience—we are to be longsuffering with each other—our fuses are to be very long.
- We are to practice tolerance for one another in love—literally, we are to put up with each other.
- And then finally, we are to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This morning, though, let us move on to **verses 4-6**, and let us consider the doctrine (or the teaching) that all of us as Christians are to have in common. **»PPT»** We have covered the attitude; now, let us consider the actual foundation—the common bond—of our unity. In our lesson this morning, I would like for us to study the seven one's in **Ephesians 4:4-6**. In our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1830**. If you will, please look with me at **Ephesians 4:4-6**. Paul says, ***“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”*** This morning, I would like for us to study these one's in a slightly different order than Paul gives them here, and the reason is, Paul seems to arrange them by topic, but I would like to study these things in more of a chronological order, or the order they would be in if someone were learning about these things for the very first time.

I. **And I would like for us to notice, first of all, that Paul says that there is ONE GOD. »PPT»**

In fact, Paul goes on to say that this one God is the “...**Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.**” What a powerful and comforting thought. The greatest thing about God is not that He is a King (which He is), not that He is a Judge (which He is), but the greatest thing about God is that He is our Father—a Father who loves us very much. There is one God, and this is the most basic plank in the platform of Christian unity, that God is our Father. In fact, it has been suggested that one of God’s favorite words is “**one.**” Way back in **Deuteronomy 6:4**, the Bible says, “**Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!**” There is one God.

And yet it does not take very long in world history to discover that people start worshiping different “**gods.**” Even in the Old Testament, we can read about Baal, and Asherah, and Molech, and the various other pagan deities that people created for themselves. »PPT» If you go down to the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, you can see an actual idol of Baal—right there in the display case—dating from around the time of Moses. If you look at the statue, you will notice that Baal is in his traditional “**striking pose.**” His hand is pulled back as if he is about to hit you—that is the way people thought about Baal. Baal, however, is not the one God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is described as our “**Father**”—what a contrast! On one hand, a loving Father, and on the other hand, a made-up deity who is right there ready to punch you in the face. And yet even from that time, people have continued adding various “**gods,**” adding to the division in the religious world around us. »PPT» And yet this is the first and most basic idea—the truth that there is only one God. This is perhaps the belief that we have most in common with the rest of the religious world.

II. **But as we narrow it down a little bit, we discover that there is ONE LORD. »PPT»**

We are talking, here, about Jesus Christ Himself. So right away, then, we are separated—not only from the Jewish people, but also from all of those who do not accept Jesus Christ as being their Lord. The word “**Lord**” refers to someone being our “**master**” or “**ruler**” or “**king.**” Paul is saying, then, that Jesus is the master of our lives.

As Peter said, referring to Jesus in **Acts 4:12**, “**And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.**” And right here, we make a break from Islam, because we teach and believe that Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Right here, then, the apostle Paul makes what to some people would be a very shocking statement—that there is only “**one Lord.**” Jesus said it best in **John 14:6**, when He said, “**I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.**” Paul made a similar statement in **1 Corinthians 8:5-6**, “**For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as**

indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.” So, there is *“one Lord.”*

This statement would have made quite an impact and would have been quite offensive in the ancient Roman world. We know from history that the Romans were extremely tolerant of various religions. The Roman Empire established what is known as the **“Pax Romana,”** the **“Peace of Rome.”** When the Romans conquered other nations, they would actually embrace the religion of the culture—they would accept the new god as one of their own. They would basically say, **“We have plenty of room for all of your gods—bring them in!”** »PPT» In the city of Rome, they actually built what came to be known as the **“Pantheon.”** The word **“Pantheon”** literally means, **“The Temple of all Gods.”** The building itself is the oldest surviving concrete domed structure in the world. It is huge. It has been used as a pattern for hundreds of domed structures around the world. On the inside are many little niches—little shelves and cubbyholes. Whenever Rome would conquer a nation, they would bring an idol of the newly-discovered god to Rome, and they would place it here in the Pantheon. All new gods were accepted and were worshiped in the Pantheon. They had statues of Zeus, and Mercury, and Osiris, and Isis, and Artemis. And yet when Jesus came along, there was a problem, because Jesus did not claim to be one of many lords, but He claimed to be the one and only. The Romans had a hard time dealing with that, because the early Christians refused to worship Jesus as one of many, but they worshiped Jesus as the *“one Lord.”* When the Romans offered the Christians a little shelf for Jesus in the Pantheon, the early Christians said, **“No thank you,”** and that was a huge problem. »PPT» And so the circle starts to close—as Christians, we not only believe in one God, but we also believe in one Lord.

III. As we continue looking at the seven one’s from the point of view of someone learning them for the first time—in chronological order—we also find that there is ONE SPIRIT. »PPT»

The Holy Spirit plays a key role in maintaining the unity of the Lord’s church. On the night before He died, Jesus said to the apostles in John 16:13, **“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”** Later on, the apostle Peter would confirm that the Bible did not come from men, but from God. In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter said, **“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”**

This passage addresses one of the main obstacles to unity these days. A lot of people will say, **“The Spirit told me this...,”** and then someone else says, **“But the Spirit told me this...,”** and those two things are completely opposite. However, we know from the Scriptures that the Spirit will never deliver two conflicting messages to two different people. And so the problem is not with the Spirit—the problem is with

man-made creeds and doctrines. In order to have unity, then, we need to agree that the Bible is the word of God—the sword of the Spirit, and that the Bible is our only authority in all religious matters. That is why we do not have a creed here at the Four Lakes congregation. The Baptists will never accept the Methodist creed, and the Methodists will never accept the Baptist creed. Therefore, both creeds need to be thrown out completely, and we need to come together on the word of God alone. By doing this, we rely on God’s Spirit as our only guide—teaching us through the inspired word of God.

You might remember from **verse 3**, that Paul told us to ***“preserve the unity of the Spirit.”*** It is important to note that we were not commanded to ***“create”*** unity, we were not commanded to ***“manufacture”*** unity, but we were told to ***“preserve”*** unity. The problem with most modern attempts at religious unity is that people ignore what the Bible teaches and they then try to create some kind of unity separate and apart from the Scriptures. This past week, I pulled up behind a car at the Wendy’s drive-thru, and the car had a rainbow bumper sticker supporting the gay rights movement, they had a bumper sticker supporting a certain presidential candidate, and then they had a bumper sticker with a huge comma right in the middle of it. At that bottom of the comma sticker, the slogan said, ***“God is still speaking.”*** The advertising campaign for that particular denomination makes the argument that we should not place a period where God has placed a comma. And the idea is that God is still revealing His will to people today. So, God might have been against homosexuality in the past, but God ended that sentence with a comma—God is still speaking, and so today God is saying something else. And now that God has changed His mind, let us all get together, let us all be ***“united”*** with the gay rights movement. That is the argument. But that is not what Paul is talking about here! Paul, though, tells us to ***“preserve”*** the unity of the Spirit. We are not to create some kind of artificial man-made unity by continuing to write our own Bible, but we are to ***“preserve”*** what God has already provided through the written and inspired word of God. By the way, I checked it out by going to the end of my Bible, and the last verse does, in fact, end with a period, not a comma. The last verse of the Bible says, ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”*** PERIOD! In fact, just a few verses back, the Bible says, ***“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”*** And again, that sentence ends with a PERIOD, not a comma.

In my office, I have a large digital clock on the wall—some of you may have the same thing—but it is a clock that receives a radio signal from the national atomic clock somewhere in Colorado. We know how hard it is to get even a few clocks in our house to agree with one another, but the clock in my office is based on a very interesting idea—the idea that all clocks anywhere in the United States can agree. Any clocks that receive that same signal will agree with each other. When God established the church, He intended something very similar—we are not to make up our own rules, but churches all around the world are to use the Bible as their

standard, and just like the clock in my office, they should be able to agree with each other.

Once we have weeded out all of the religions that teach anything other than one God, and the rule of Jesus as one Lord, and the importance of the one Spirit, we get down to the final four ones—the ones that even fewer people can agree on.

IV. As we move on, we notice in verse 5 that there is ONE FAITH. **»PPT»**

It is so common today to hear people talking about the different “**faiths**.” Someone may come up to us and want to know of what “**faith**” we are. Are we of the Jewish faith, or of the Islamic faith, or of the Catholic faith, or of the Protestant faith...and if we are, then are we of the Baptist faith, or of the Methodist faith, or of the Pentecostal faith? We could go on forever like this, but Paul teaches in **Ephesians 4** that there is “**one faith**.” That is, there is one faith of which God approves, designed by Him, and established by Him—there is only one faith, and if a person wants to be saved, he must be obedient to that faith.

In **Acts 6:7**, the Bible says that, “**The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.**” And so the “**one faith**” is something that we can obey. This is what Jude had in mind in **Jude 3** when he said that we must, “**...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**” “**Faith**,” here refers to the teaching of Christ, or the New Testament. It is absolutely ridiculous, then, to say, “**Well, you preach your faith and I’ll preach my faith, and we will still get along; we will still be in fellowship with one another.**” Instead, the Bible teaches that there is one faith, and if someone is not teaching that faith, then he or she is teaching something false.

Some time ago, I saw a Mother Goose and Grimm comic strip. Grimm (the dog) walks up to Mother Goose and says, “**Okay, I chewed up your shoe, but don’t get mad...let’s just agree to disagree!**” The cartoonist was illustrating how ridiculous it is in some situations to “**agree to disagree.**” In matters of faith, then, it is not possible to be unified without a common authority, or faith.

Here is an interesting question for those who would urge us to ignore doctrine: If 400 different preachers can preach 400 different doctrines in 400 different church buildings scattered all over Madison and still be pleasing to God, then why couldn’t one preacher preach 400 different doctrines in one church building and still be pleasing to God? Why couldn’t I preach that baptism is and isn’t necessary? Why couldn’t I preach that instrumental music is both right and wrong? Why couldn’t I preach that gay marriage is both a blessing and an abomination? In reality, though, we must be united in our faith.

V. As we look back at Ephesians 4, we notice also that there is ONE BAPTISM. ▶PPT▶

When we combine all that the Bible says on baptism, we have to conclude that the baptism referred to in this passage is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of past sins. Any baptism other than this is not the *“one baptism”* of Ephesians 4.

Some people want to say that there are three baptisms today—there is sprinkling baptism, there is pouring baptism, and there is immersion baptism. In fact, some churches will give you a choice—whatever you feel you need to do. We need to understand, though, that the word *“baptism”* literally means *“immersion.”* It would be rather ridiculous, then, to refer to sprinkling immersion, pouring immersion, and immersion immersion. Even in our English dictionaries, when you look up the history of the word baptism, the literal and original meaning of the word is *“immersion.”* The prefix literally means *“to dip,”* as a person would dip a piece of clothing in a vat of dye to change its color. A person, then, is either immersed as the Bible instructs, or he is not immersed as the Bible instructs. Paul very clearly teaches that there is *“one baptism.”*

VI. As we look back to Ephesians 4, we also discover (as we narrow our focus even further) that there is only ONE BODY. ▶PPT▶

When we come to know that there is one God, one Lord, and one Spirit, when we study the one faith, we are baptized with the one baptism, and at that point we are then added to the one body. The one body is identified for us a few chapters earlier—in Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul refers to the relationship between the Father and the Son, and he says, *“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* The Lord’s church is the one body. The body and the church are one and the same.

From time to time, someone will come to our door and try to get us to accept some *“late breaking news”* from God, that there is *“another testament”* of Jesus Christ that was only revealed in the mid 1800’s. But my question to them is this: **If I had lived in the year 200 AD, for example, could I be pleasing to God by reading and obeying nothing but the New Testament?** Their answer has always been, *“Yes.”* And the follow-up question is, **“Then why can I not do the same thing today?”** What we are begging for today is for a return to pure and simple pre-denominational Christianity. We are asking people to obey the gospel and simply allow themselves to be added to the Lord’s church. If all people would do this, denominational barriers would fall, and all people could be members of the same church, the body of Christ. As it is, though, we continue to be divided, because religious leaders continue to reject the simple concept of the *“one body.”*

VII. As we come to the end of our study for this morning, we get down to the only “one” left, as we see in verse 4 that there is ONE HOPE.

»PPT»

Two chapters earlier, in Ephesians 2:12, Paul had referred to a time in the past when the Gentiles in Ephesus were, “...*separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*” But in contrast, the very next verse says, “*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*” And so we find that the blood of Christ brings us the “*one hope.*” Only those who are “*in Christ*” are allowed to have the “*one hope*” of Ephesians 4. The hope we have is of going to heaven. This is not just hoping that the Packers win, or hoping that peanut butter cup is the flavor of the day, but Paul here is referring to the hope of being with God for eternity—it is the hope of going home to heaven. It is this hope that allows us to keep our focus when life seems to go flying by. Paul then says that as Christians we have “*one hope.*”

Conclusion:

As we close this morning, I would suggest that we need to teach and affirm all seven of these ones if we are to ever have unity in the religious world. It’s easy to say, “**Yeah, we believe in the seven ones,**” but as we have discovered this morning, the religious world is not really interested in having unity. In fact, most people are perfectly content to have their own man-made doctrines and to remain divided in hundreds of little categories. Our goal, though, is to lay aside all man-made creeds and to unite upon the word of God.

If you would like to have the one hope we have studied this morning, if you believe in the one Father, the one Lord, and the one Spirit, if you would like to be a part of the one body and accept the one faith, then you are ready to be baptized this morning with the one baptism—an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

If you have something we need to pray about as a congregation, you can also let us know about that this morning—write it down, pass it forward during the next song, and we can pray about it right now. If you are ready to obey the gospel, or if you have something we need to pray about, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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