

UPLOOK

JAN-FEB 2011

Assess the Need • Catch the Vision • Take the Challenge

ONE SPIRIT

Sam Thorpe

ONE LORD

Steve Price

ONE BODY

Mark Kolchin

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Concerns &
Opportunities

HOW ARE WE DOING WITH
UNITY?



ENDEAVORING TO KEEP THE
UNITY OF THE SPIRIT
IN THE BOND OF PEACE. — EPHESIANS 4:3

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“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one flock, and one Shepherd” (Jn. 10:16).

Unity, Uniformity, and Unanimity

They're not all the same.

We know that the *unity* of His people is very dear to the heart of our Lord Jesus because it is one of the subjects He prayed about shortly before going to the cross (Jn. 17:20-23). While that unity certainly has practical considerations, the Lord was referring to mystery of the church—Jews and Gentiles united in one body. Later, Paul would outline the unity of the universal church (Eph. 4:4-6) by listing seven magnificent items that are positional: they are shared by every member of the body of Christ, regardless of that believer's appreciation of them or the quality of his Christian walk. But there is also a conditional aspect to the unity of believers. These great truths are to be translated into daily living. Hence, in connection with those positional truths, we are instructed how to behave in order to “*preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph. 4:1-3). This is a description of practical unity in the church.

There are two related concepts that are also significant to our understanding of practical church unity. Firstly, unity is not to be confused with *uniformity*. The same passages that emphasize the unity of the assembly also describe its divine diversity (e.g. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). Taking this principle seriously actually fosters unity. No end of irritation develops when a believer expects everyone else to be just like him. Often, a believer will view his own particular burden or ministry as the paramount duty of all Christians. As a result, he doesn't value (or sometimes even notice) the roles and ministries of the other members of the body. Instead of appreciating the wisdom of God in placing every member in the body just as He desired (1 Cor. 12:18), a believer who expects uniformity will be constantly discouraged, self-righteous, and critical. This betrays a tragic misunderstanding of the nature of the local church. The Lord is infinitely creative and does not make duplicate Christians. He gives every believer a crucial and unique role. We can all rejoice as we see how other believers are equipped to meet vital needs that we, left to ourselves, had barely noticed.

This diversity, however, does not extend to every element of church life. *Unanimity* is required in many areas. For example, diversity of doctrine is not a strength—it is not a virtue to have a diversity of viewpoints on the deity of Christ or the importance of New Testament church principles. Furthermore, there are many “practical” elements of the Christian life where we don't desire variety. “You're patient; I'm not. Isn't diversity wonderful?” We trust that we can be in absolute agreement on moral issues or any other matter where the Scriptures speak clearly.

Lastly, unanimity is an important principle specifically for elders. Years ago, a dear Christian brother told me that when the elders of his assembly were unable to come to unanimous agreement on an issue, one of them would say, “Brethren, we clearly do not yet have the mind of the Lord on this. Let's continue to pray about it.” This might not be the fastest way to make decisions, but there's no doubt it is the wisest. The assembly is not a democracy where majority rules. Our duty is to discern the Lord's thoughts, as revealed in His Word. Unanimity among the elders is one of the safeguards that helps ensure that we do just that.

Let us allow the Lord to be our guide in all of these matters. He is the great unifier of His people, who has sovereignly given us our unique roles in the body. And it is His mind and will that we should seek to understand and implement in our lives.

A stylized red signature, likely of James Martin, written in a cursive script.

U P L O O K

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Abundant Toughness

What does nature really tell us about life?

As a young boy, I absorbed the message of the fledgling environmental movement by watching *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau* on television. Today, a new “green” generation has been raised on PBS and BBC programs which universally reflect an unbiblical view of humanity and of its responsibility to steward the natural world.

A case in point is the visually stunning BBC television series *Planet Earth*. While each episode considers a different ecosystem, from the poles to the jungle rainforest to the deep ocean, the underlying theme is predictable: life on Earth is fragile—human population is growing, and this is a threat to wild animals that need our help if they and we are to survive.

If I set aside this extreme environmental mantra and watch the series through the eyes of a Christian biologist, I come to a rather different conclusion about life on Earth. Life is tough. Life is resilient. Life is abundant. For example, Antarctic Emperor Penguins **walk** almost 100 miles inland to their breeding grounds where the male penguin endures months of winter darkness with no food or water and temperatures down to -140 degrees Fahrenheit to incubate a single egg. Fragile? Not by any measure! In the baking heat of Death Valley, California, life lies dormant in the sand, ready to rebound into growth with the influx of seasonal rains. Mountain rains journey a thousand miles to the Okavango delta in Africa, transforming a portion of the Kalahari Desert into a lush swamp, able to sustain thousands of African elephants, zebra, and other species through the seasonal African drought.

Life is tough and life is resilient. And the sheer profusion of life on Earth is staggering! The shrimp-like ocean crustacean called krill are by weight the most abundant animals on earth. The mass of a single krill

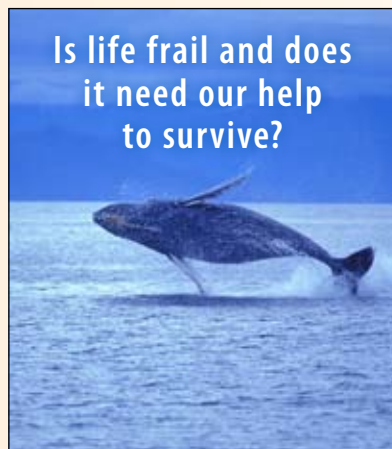
species is estimated at half a billion tons. A fourth of the world’s land is covered in grass. Fueled by the sun, grass supports incomprehensible numbers of grazing animals worldwide. But even this abundance is dwarfed by the massive number of individual microscopic phytoplankton which turn hundreds of square kilometers of ocean green during a seasonal “bloom” and collectively produce three-fourths of all oxygen on Earth.

Such enduring toughness, marvelous resilience, and startling abundance of life are a surprise to people who are increasingly confined to urban areas and who continuously hear the message that life on Earth is frail and needs our help to survive. They are cut off

from a direct experience of the overflowing variety and abundance of life God has given us to draw on for sustenance and which He has charged us to steward. Without a biblical perspective, nature is reduced to landscape decorations and a tool for political indoctrination instead of a vibrant reflection of the power, creativity, and provision of a loving God. Sadly, the result has been a call to steward (control) the people and save the whales rather than the biblical imperative to save the people and steward the planet. 🕒

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.

Editor’s note: We mistakenly printed an error in the last *Science & You* column, in the previous issue of *Uplook*. Titled “The Sound of Music”, the subheading should have read, “*Is there more to it than meets the ear?*”



Read previous columns: www.goodnewsnow.info/science

Are We Alone?

A pair of videos that provide good answers to some very big questions.

Is there life beyond ourselves? Can science see what is beyond our own planet, even beyond our universe? Since its beginnings, science has pushed the limits of knowledge – looking for hints of the unknown among the known. Are we alone biologically in the universe? Are we alone spiritually? Matter, energy and life speak for themselves if we are willing to listen.

Join a scientist and an engineer/theologian as they discuss what living things and the laws of physics tell us about whether we are alone in the universe.

In conjunction with Uplook Ministries, colleagues Michael G. Windheuser, Ph.D. and David Penny, Th.M. gave presentations at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville, AL. Video recordings from this special event have been mastered into a format that can be utilized to teach important science concepts, and for use in outreach opportunities.

Contact to order. Visit online: www.streetlightilluminations.com

Email: streetlightilluminations@gmail.com or call Chris at (785) 554-1887.



WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN TN

Attention all ladies and girls: for a time of spiritual renewal and revitalization, make plans to be at Horton Haven Christian Camp during Mar 18-19 for a "Women's Weekend Away." Girls and women (ages 13+) are invited. There will be plenty of good food, laughter, prizes, plus meaningful messages by Adria Warner. For more information or to register, visit: www.hortonhaven.org
Contact: Horton Haven Christian Camp P. O. Box 276, Chapel Hill, TN 37034
email: wendy@hortonhaven.org
ph: 931-364-7656

SPRING TEEN RETREAT IN GEORGIA

Camp Hope will host their retreat in the will of the Lord Mar 25-27. The speaker will be Frank O'Neill (NJ). The retreat begins Friday with registration at 6 PM and ends Sunday at 11:30 AM (no lunch provided). Cost: \$60/person. Registration available on the web site: www.camphopega.org **Contact:** Ed Myers 706-863-0875 email: myersed@yahoo.com

FATHER/SON RETREAT IN GEORGIA

Camp Hope will host their Father/Son Retreat in the will of the Lord Apr 15-17. The speaker will be Sam Thorpe (GA). The conference begins Friday with registration at 6:00 PM and ends Sunday with lunch. Cost: \$60/family. A registration form is available on the camp web site www.camphopega.org
Contact: Steve Roys, 7011 Pony Lake Rd., Dahlonega, GA 30533 ph: 770-536-4787 email: camphopega@arilion.com

ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN TEXAS

The 56th annual Dallas Area Spring Conference will be held Apr 15-17 at Wheatland Bible Chapel, located at 1303 W. Wheatland Rd., Duncanville, Texas 75116. Larry Price (FL) and Jessie Gentile (FL) are the expected speakers. The conference begins Friday at 7:30 PM, ending at 4:00 PM Sunday. **Contact:** John Daniels ph: 972-424-9889 or for further information, please visit online: www.wheatlandbiblechapel.org

INDIANA SPRING CONFERENCE

The 19th annual spring conference at the Logansport Gospel Chapel, 321 Cliff Drive, Logansport, IN 46947 will be held Apr 16. The expected speaker is Mark Woodhouse (IA). There will be two messages starting at 10 AM with a free lunch and visiting following. **Contact:** Ralph Garver ph: 574-722-1012 email: leegar@frontier.com

BIBLE CONFERENCE IN CHICAGO

The Palos Hills Christian Assembly is pleased to announce its annual Spring Conference for Apr 29-May 1. Details to follow. **Contact:** ph: 708-233-1268 email: paloschristians@hotmail.com

VESSELS OF HONOR 2011

A young adults conference convened by East Tulsa Bible Chapel will be held on the campus of Park University, Parkville, MO May 27-30. The theme will be "Embracing the Mantle—carrying on the work of God."

FRONT LINES *continued*

General session speakers are Warren Henderson (WI), Steve Price (KS), and Scott DeGroff (KS). Seminar session speakers, along with the general session speakers, will be Craig Shakarji (MD) and Lynn DeGroff (KS). "...a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use." II Tim. 2:21. **Contact:** Jim Lindamood ph: 918-663-1121 email: allmon@intcon.net Dan Moffitt ph: 918-744-6484 email: danmoffitt@sbcglobal.net web: www.vesselsofhonor.org

EMMAUS CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

Peter Kerr has been appointed as the new Regional Director for the Emmaus Correspondence School ministry in Canada. The official transfer from Don DeBaeremaeker, who has faithfully served the Lord as Director for approximately 10 years, happened Sep 20, 2010. The new address for ECS Canada will be: Peter Kerr, E.C.S., P.O. Box 156, Englehart, ON, P0J 1H0 Canada ph: 705-544-7707 email: info@emmauscanada.org

NEW ASSEMBLY IN MAINE

A new assembly, Garland Christian Fellowship, is meeting in Garland, ME for worship and fellowship. Meetings are on Sunday mornings starting at 9:45 AM and Thursday evenings for prayer. **Contact:** John Hebert ph: 207-924-3332 Michael Supp ph: 207-924-3390 email: gcfme@yahoo.com

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Camp Ministry Positions in ON Guelph Bible Conference Centre is looking for a couple to join our ministry in the beautiful city of Guelph, ON. He will serve as Facilities Manager

and she as Dining Room Supervisor/Volunteer Coordinator. Both jobs are full-time, "hands-on" positions. Our desire is to have a couple that is called to a Christian camping/conference ministry, who are willing to serve our Lord Jesus in "building up the household of faith" and reaching the "unsaved" for Him. Visit www.guelphbiblecc.com for a list of qualifications and job descriptions. Send resume to kmorrish@guelphbiblecc.com

Camp Manager Position in PEI

Emmanuel Bible Camp, located in Prince Edward Island, Canada since 1954, is looking to the Lord for a camp manager for the 2011 camp season. The camp's purpose is to encourage each camper to enter into and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. **Contact:** Gerry MacLeod ph: 902-892-2800 email: gerald@pei.sympatico.ca web: emmanuelbiblecamp.com Street Address: 540 Gay Rd., Upton, PE Mailing Address: RR#3 St. Peter's Bay, Upton, PE C0A 2A0

COMMENDATIONS

Brady and Becky Collier

After some time serving the Lord in Honduras, Brady and Becky moved to San Jose, CA for a nine month training period with the Discipleship Intern Training program, then returned to Lubbock, TX. They will be actively involved in South Plains Bible Chapel, their home assembly, in a teaching capacity to build up believers in the faith,



and to help in equipping them for serving the Lord for about a year and then consider serving in either Honduras or elsewhere in the US.

Daniel Morell


The saints gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ at Fox Valley Bible Chapel in Little Chute, WI would like to commend Daniel Morell to the work of evangelism in Brookings, SD for the next year. Daniel has been involved in a number of evangelism settings including local outreaches and various trips for evangelism as a young man to SD, MI, AL, and others, including the most recent GNOM team 2009/10. Daniel will be supporting and growing in evangelistic and discipleship efforts under the guidance of Larry Sax. Please join with us in prayer for Daniel in this ministry over the next year in South Dakota.



HOME CALL

Pearl González, beloved wife of Mariano González (IL) for almost 53 years, was called Home January 9th. Pearl is now "with



Christ, which is far better" (Phil 1:23). They launched Audio-Lit Ministries in 1970, spreading the gospel through tape, print and radio in various languages for the last 41 years. www.audiolit.net 

One Lord

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!”

Paul cites seven key facets of oneness, and the phrase *one Lord* just so happens to be fixed like a fulcrum in the very center of this septet.

Today’s world is saturated with those who desire to be the next leader. Indeed, the airwaves are constantly being interrupted with a commercial for the next person who should be in charge of our country, county, or city. For some, the insecurity bred by this democratic process can be overwhelming and frightening.

Thus, the simple phrase *one Lord* brings a wealth of peace. We do not have to endure annoying political campaigns or be anxious through an electoral process. We do not have the uncertainty of the unknown. Our head, our leader, our ruler is already identified and installed in power. God has already determined our head of state, thus freeing us, as citizens of heaven, to devote ourselves to service for our Sovereign.



However, to an Ephesian mind living in a Greek-Roman culture, *one Lord* (Eph. 4:5) had an even deeper meaning. Paul goes to great lengths

to paint the backdrop for his statement. The Ephesians had been heading down a raging river destined to end in a spiraling waterfall of certain death (Eph. 2:1-3). Then God mercifully stepped in and transported them to the land of the living and seated them in an eternal position with the Lord (Eph. 2:4-6). Paul goes on to reveal that they were no longer aliens and strangers but had been made fellow heirs with God’s covenant people (Eph. 2:11-13). Furthermore, the Lord satisfied a document

that had them on death row (Eph. 2:14-17). They were now integrated into a brand new institution composed of two main people groups: Hebrews and non-Hebrews (Eph. 2:19-22). They had a new name: the church; they had a new purpose: to display God’s wisdom in this venture; they had a new goal: to glorify God; and they had a new leader: the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:8-20).

By all of these glorious truths, Paul highlights the quality and preciousness of the unity that typifies this new organism. Having done so, he calls us to walk worthy of it. He exhorts our character to be consistent with it. He encourages us to maintain the unity that fundamentally belongs to the peoples the Lord has joined into one new spiritual building (Eph. 4:1-3). This is why Paul cites seven key facets of oneness, and the phrase *one Lord* just so happens to be fixed like a fulcrum in the very center of this septet (Eph. 4:4-6).

One

There are three things, then, to consider in the phrase *one Lord*. First is the concept of singularity. This is communicated by the use of the word *one* in the context of a discussion on unity. The Spirit of God is drawing our attention to focus upon a single person. There are not two or three or more leaders in the body of Christ. We only have one head.

There is nothing more frustrating in bureaucratic government than the chore of locating the appropriate authority to deal with the problem you face. It seems that each administration’s director points to a different jurisdiction that you must wade through in order to answer your question. In contrast, it is exceptionally uncomplicated to have one Lord. No searching for the right department chief;

ONE LORD *continued*

there is only one recipient for all queries, prayers, intercessions, confessions, and compliments. Perhaps we have failed to realize just what an organizational blessing this one Lord status really is for His heavenly citizens.

Structuring the church so that all power and authority reside in one person demands an eminently qualified individual. What an incredible blessing to the church that she has as her leader the only person perfectly qualified for such a role! We have the best there is, and He is already serving in the position of one Lord. We have to confess that the provision of One fully qualified for that role bespeaks God's grand wisdom and foresight when He designed the church.

Lord

The second consideration of the phrase one Lord is that it stresses the aspect of His place: He is, after all, Lord. The use of this particular title denotes Christ's authority by virtue of His ownership. He bought the church with His own blood and therefore has the right to conduct business as He sees fit (1 Cor. 6:19b-20). There are to be no other voices in matters of state. We do not use prayer as a means of lobbying the head of state to compromise. We do not coerce Him to our way of thinking or policymaking. He is not on our side as if one of the infantry. Rather, we are directly under His authority.

Joshua experienced a similar epiphany when He met the pre-incarnate Christ on the battlefield the night before Jericho was taken. He asked the Angel of the Lord whose side He was on. The Angel's answer corrected Joshua's foggy thinking. *"No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come"* (Josh. 5:14). Joshua immediately behaved himself in a manner consistent with a warrior in the presence of one with a higher rank. He appropriately verbalized the disposition of a humble and lower-ranking soldier (Josh. 5:14b-15). So should we respond when the title Lord is uttered in Paul's treatise on unity. There is no other stance we can assume.

Response

The final point of consideration is our reaction to the title. Since there is a singular focus upon unity in the context of the passage, the questions must be asked: Are my attitudes and actions adding to or detracting from our Lord's position in our meetings? Is my attitude serving as a valued tool in building up God's people or a wrecking ball that demolishes the Lord's building blow by blow? Are my words the kind that plant emotional seeds which sprout into division, or do I defuse problems by serving as a dead-end of information? Do I redirect other members of the body to first go to the person that is perceived to have been offended—face-to-face and soul-to-soul as the Lord counseled his disciples (Mt. 18:15)? Additionally, am I intimidating in my opinions to the point of pressuring others to follow me as lord, rather than the only one with the title Lord? Am I marring my attachment to the head by covertly thinking that I really know the best course of action for the dilemma the elders are pondering? Do I feel my insights are profound enough to provide the needed wisdom for everyone else? Could I possibly demonstrate behavior consistent with Diotrephes that reveals a desire for personal preeminence rather than Christ's preeminence (3 Jn. 9)? Simply put, is the one Lord who possesses all authority truly free to exercise it in my personal or corporate existence?

He is the only one who has the right to that claim. May we voluntarily lay ourselves down as Joshua did, and offer our undivided devotion to our one Lord. If He is not afforded that place, we might one day discover that He is not in the assembly at all, but outside, knocking (Rev. 3:20). 📌



May we voluntarily lay ourselves down as Joshua did, and offer our undivided devotion to our one Lord.

The One Spirit

Three distinct relationships enable true harmony.

"The Holy Spirit is the invisible force within the dynamics of the Christian life."

Christian unity is a dynamic condition that brings tremendous blessing. It must be pursued with all diligence and, once found, guarded and preserved. Although fragile at times, it is the source of peace and a wonderful prize for the meek and lowly of heart. Without unity, the door to our life, home and assembly fellowship is opened to discouragement, discord, and the attack of the devil.

It is the "unity of the Spirit" that we speak of here. Our fallen flesh cares not for unity but for self. It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that the selfish flesh can be defeated and the paths of unity be pursued. Notice the key words found in the preceding verses of Ephesians 4:2-3: lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing, love and peace. It takes the attitudes or fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) to foster a relationship that desires and delights in such a spiritual unity.

Therefore, the means of unity is by submission and yieldedness to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Unlike secular unity that has

its roots in compromise or consensus, the believer's call to unity is built upon a solid foundation of truth. This is the work of the Holy Spirit: to guide us into all truth (Jn. 16:13). Hence, our unity is not built upon that which we can all support and agree upon. Our unity is the product of being in the Spirit of Truth, and thus enabled by the Spirit to embrace the truth of God together as one.

The process of the Holy Spirit bringing unity to the saints can be understood within three distinct relationships or directions: unity with God, unity with Christ, and unity with one another as children of God. I would suggest that these three relationships are progressive in nature. Our unity with one another flows from our unity with Christ, and our unity with Christ flows from our unity with God. The one Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, is the conduit that connects these relationships and makes that precious unity possible

Unity with God

God is a Spirit being (Jn. 4:24). He is not confined to or defined by space, matter, or time. He is invisible. He is separated from our material and physical world, yet can be known and approached by His creatures. How can this be? God has equipped man for this relationship. He has given man a spirit that sets him apart from the rest of creation. Our spiritual connection to God is established "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). God invites the believer to worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23). It is the Holy Spirit that "beareth witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16) that we are the children of God. It is the Holy Spirit that "maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27). These and many other verses of Scripture make it clear that we can have unity with God only by His Spirit.

Unity with Christ

The Holy Spirit is the key to our relationship to Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that teaches us of the person of Christ, glorifies Christ through us, and is the conduit of communication between Christ and the inner man of the believer (Jn. 16:13-15).



THE ONE SPIRIT *continued*

It is the life of the Holy Spirit within us that executes the power of our new life in Christ and frees us from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). The fruit of the Spirit is the very character and attitude of Christ revealed in us. It is the indwelling Spirit of Christ that is the proof that we belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). If, at the time of the rapture our mortal bodies are in the grave, it becomes the work of the one Spirit to quicken and unite in perfect unity, for the first time, our body, soul, and spirit (Rom. 8:11). You might say, that from the cradle of our new life in Christ to the resurrection of our body from the grave, the Holy Spirit is at work assuring our unity to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Unity within the body of Christ

Our unity within the body of Christ is fully dependent upon the indwelling work of the one Spirit. To begin with, our very entrance into that spiritual body occurred at the time of salvation when *“by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:13). Then it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to understand the spiritual nature and truths of the one body (1 Cor. 2:12-16). As we are yielded to the control of the Holy Spirit, we are able to exercise spiritual gifts for the edification of the body. The Holy Spirit enables believers to *“be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another...”* (Eph. 4:30-32).

The one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is the invisible force within the dynamics of the Christian life. He is the cohesiveness that brings balance and unity to the four pillars of the church seen in Acts 2:42: the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. He is the divine resident indwelling us and uniting us to God the Father, God the Son, and the sons of God. By Him alone is it possible for us to attain to the desire of the apostle Paul: *“Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Php. 2:2).

This unity with the Godhead, by the one Spirit is the ultimate anticipation of the Lord for His saints. A review of His prayer in John 17, particularly verses 20 to 26, will make this desire of the Lord’s heart evident. This oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father includes a sharing of, and our joining with, their presence, their glory, and their love. Such oneness is too wonderful to take in fully. It is by the one Spirit that all this is ours for an eternity to come. Listen to our oneness with the Spirit expressed in the closing verses of God’s precious Word: *“The Spirit and the bride say, Come”* (Rev. 22:17). 📖

“Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Php. 2:2)



**Cross Canada Cruisers
announced for 2011!**

**{ A Canadian Evangelistic
Field Training Ministry }**

Attention young men, laboring assemblies, and fellow workers! Cross Canada Cruisers was blessed with another successful season in 2010, and in the will of the Lord plans are being set for 2011. C3 runs from **June 1st - August 27th, 2011**. Exact locations are still being determined, but we **urgently** need to know if you are interested! Eager to help the reach of the gospel in the province of Ontario? Are you a male over the age of 18, well reported of in your assembly? Faithful, available, and teachable? We are seeking young, committed, spiritual men, and evangelistically minded assemblies to work alongside each other for the sake of the gospel. **For more information, visit: www.teamc3.info**
Contact Randy Hoffman: randyhoffman@sympatico.ca or Fil Capuano: fil@chatsworthproject.ca

Facebook

Reaching the biggest mission field on earth

The Lord Jesus was a people person. His ministry was about building relationships and touching lives with His grace, mercy, and love. He met people where they were—at a well, by a pool, on a road—and those who truly connected with Him were never the same. The apostles were devoted to the same relationship building. They went into the synagogues and market places and endured much hardship in the mission of spreading the gospel. Men and women down through the centuries have gone to great lengths to fulfill the Great Commission by reaching people where they were. With technology came tools such as radio and television, enabling Christians to go further and reach millions more for Christ.

With the explosion of the internet, the mission field for any Christian or church can now extend to over a billion souls. Facebook alone has over 500 million users with over 50% logging in every day. A local church can use Facebook as a vital supplement to the traditional methods of outreach. Facebook is also a place to edify Christians around the world. Here are four key ways your church or ministry can use Facebook in a positive way to reach the masses with the gospel and to encourage the family of God.

1. Reaching the community. Depending on the location of your church or ministry, there are potentially thousands of people nearby. The most powerful aspect of Facebook is that friends are connected to friends. This means the reach is vast. Posting events and sharing the gospel can lead to more visitors to your website and outreaches. As the word spreads, others will be interested and can see what you are all about. Setting up a Facebook page (different from Facebook groups) is a great way to reach the community. This is not private and can be found by people in your neighborhood.

2. Global prayer. When the apostle Peter was in prison, a small group of believers was praying and the Lord delivered him. Can you imagine the power of thousands, maybe millions, of people petitioning the throne of grace?

I have personally prayed for people I have never met because of Facebook.

Prayer for missionaries can be expanded by giving more Christians the knowledge of ministries all over the world.

3. Share the work. Your local church or ministry has something to give to the universal church. Share your ideas in evangelism, ministry, and encouragement. If you are having a series of meetings, record them in audio or video, post them on your website, and share with others so they can gain the blessing as well. There are endless possibilities concerning how you can be used by God to spark interest in other churches and ministries.

4. Internal communication. Facebook is a great way to keep the Christians in your fellowship up-to-date and connected with each other. By setting up a Facebook group, believers can interact, be reminded of events going on, post prayer requests, and encourage one another. Thorold South Gospel Chapel is a great example of this. They have a private internal group that only those in fellowship can access. They share events, verses, and prayer requests with each other. Specific ministries and programs such as Awana, kids' clubs, youth groups, and men's and women's groups can make good use of Facebook groups.

Remember the principles of the Lord's dealing with people—kindness and compassion—and apply those same principles to your interactions on Facebook. Let's keep in mind the words of Colossians 3:17, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."* 🙏

For more information: mySonlight will be conducting webinars about Facebook and other social media and website topics. The first one-hour sessions will be devoted to topics surrounding Facebook safety and security, best practices, and tips for using the service more effectively. Visit the page at: www.mysonlight.com/webinars



'friend'-ly advice



As the previous article has made clear, Facebook can be a powerful tool in serving the Lord. But like all technologies, there are some significant dangers that need to be addressed if we are to safely use it for the glory of God. Of course, Facebook isn't the only website that presents these dangers. But with over half a billion users, it warrants careful consideration.

Privacy: Many Facebook users seem unaware (or unconcerned) about just how public Facebook is. Unless careful steps are taken, what we post on Facebook is available for all the world to see. Moreover, it's not enough for us to be personally careful. Our friends can easily (and innocently) post items related to us that we would have preferred to have kept private.

Testimony: By design, Facebook enables users to publicly interconnect. This allows any of our Facebook friends—including unbelievers and people we barely know—to post items on our walls (or on their own pages, but tagged to us) that give others a misleading picture of us. If an unbeliever posts a message with crude language or a link to a questionable video, song, or website on my wall, others who visit my Facebook page may very well associate it with me—even though I might not even know it's there! It's a good practice to quickly remove anything inappropriate posted by others and to graciously but firmly take steps to ensure they don't post similar items in the future.

I should also be careful about what I post myself. If my posts and comments are all about movies, questionable Internet links and videos, relationships, and so on, what testimony will I have with my friends? Do I regularly stop to consider what impressions a visitor to my Facebook page would be left with?

More seriously, we should realize that one moment of indiscretion can be permanently and globally publicized on Facebook. Whereas in the past one careless action might have gone unnoticed or known to only a few, a misstep today can immediately be made known to family, friends, coworkers, and fellow students worldwide, often with photos or videos.

Christian users of Facebook's social network need to be discerning.


This editorial staff report was based on research and feedback gleaned from concerned, spiritual brethren across North America.

False intimacy: By its very nature, Facebook can encourage superficiality. People have hundreds (sometimes thousands!) of "friends"—many of whom they don't even know. Instead of godly, mature, meaningful relationships, Facebook can lead to shallow, questionable ones. Users may be so distracted by the multitude of superficial online "friendships" that they lose sight of the genuine, godly friendships they ought to be nurturing.

Inappropriate intimacy: Facebook allows for instant intensity and private or intimate conversations with members of the opposite sex that would be acceptable nowhere else in Christian society. Regrettably, however, they can develop on Facebook when a spouse is unaware of his or her partner's friends and pastimes.

"ONE OF THE GREATEST DANGERS OF FACEBOOK IS THE IMMENSE AMOUNT OF TIME IT CAN CONSUME."

Time: Not only are more people using social sites like Facebook, the length of time spent daily has nearly doubled year over year for the past few years.¹ In many cases, that time is not spent doing anything spiritually productive. Instead, we can be caught up in an endless web of information, much of which is useless and some of which is actually harmful. This is not to say that everyone wastes their time on Facebook—there are countless people who use it wisely. Still, we need to exercise care lest it become a time-waster instead of a tool for serving the Lord.

None of this is meant to imply that Christians should avoid this social network service. When used carefully, Facebook can help us glorify God, build up believers, and reach the lost; but each of the pitfalls listed above is real, common, and significant. It is our hope that, by highlighting them, we can help believers to use Facebook in a Christ-honoring manner. 

Uplook has a page at: www.facebook.com/uplook

Endnote

1. Neilson Research, www.bit.ly/social-media-usage

One Spirit and Mind

“Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Php. 1:27).

If absence of strife is the definition of unity, then it can best be found in a cemetery.

These words hold special meaning to us when we realize they were penned by a man who was being held a prisoner of Rome because of his unwavering devotion to the gospel. The life of a prisoner of Rome was tenuous. Paul had expressed confidence that he would be released. Nevertheless, knowing his immediate future to be uncertain, Paul focused the attention of the believers upon that for which he was prepared to die and that which they should be united in defending and proclaiming.

“One spirit and mind” is certainly a clear description of Christian unity. The word picture Paul paints so lucidly is that of many people standing as one person. But unity can’t exist in a vacuum. The world defines unity as

a state in which people live peacefully together; but, if absence of strife is the definition of unity, then unity can best be found in a cemetery. Unity must have a common truth to defend, proclaim, and stand for, and the apostle Paul clearly identified that truth as the gospel of Jesus

Christ. As believers, we may legitimately have different opinions about many things, but there are no alternative beliefs to the gospel.

The gospel of Christ produces enemies from people of all religions and from people of no religion. World leaders, both religious and secular, find their own unity in their hatred and opposition of the gospel. The language the Spirit uses in this verse clearly shows that the gospel was under siege during

the days of the early church. But let us be clear that the gospel is under siege today as well, and Paul’s words to the believers at Philippi have great application for the church in 2010. It is a foregone conclusion that Satan and the world will make every effort and use any device to convince Christians to compromise their belief in the gospel and lessen their fervor for proclaiming it to the lost.

Paul’s use of two evocative phrases—stand fast and striving together—teaches us that unity among believers must have two components: a determination to defend the truth of the gospel against all attacks and a determination to proclaim the truth of the gospel as Christ commanded.

Stand fast

Perhaps as Paul wrote the words, “Stand fast in one spirit,” he was picturing the Roman Tortoise military formation so effective in the warfare of that day. The Tortoise was essentially a defensive formation in which most of the legionaries would hold their shields overhead, while those in the front rows carried their shields before them. This “shell” created a nearly impenetrable defense, shielding all from incoming missiles. The key to the success of this formation was each Roman soldier holding fast his position in close formation. If a gap were allowed to open, it would weaken the formation’s ability to stand as one man, and disaster might follow.

Stand fast is a military metaphor that illustrates a soldier’s refusal to desert his position while under tremendous attack, and his willingness to defend that position at all costs, even to the point of sacrificing his life. Paul could use that metaphor honestly because he was an example of that very willingness.



ONE SPIRIT AND MIND *continued*

Paul's attitude while ministering to the young churches of his day, and his attitude while awaiting his sentence from Roman authorities, was to hold firm to the gospel, "whether it be by life, or by death" (Php. 1:20).

Paul also held his ground against Judaizers who intended to pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7), those who meant "to reverse or change to the opposite." The intent of the Judaizers was to change the gospel from a message of salvation offered freely in response to faith, to a message of salvation earned by self-righteousness and good works.

Today, the church must also stand united against the countless attacks and strong influence of those who would pervert the gospel or reject it as God's only message of salvation to lost sinners. Pluralist religious leaders claim all religions offer equally valid answers regarding who God is and how man can approach Him. Pluralists take the position that "Christianity may be one among many paths to God."¹

The World Council of Churches, which claims to represent 290 million Christians the world over, rejects the gospel of Jesus Christ, saying, "Because we have seen and experienced goodness, truth, and holiness among followers of other paths and ways than that of Jesus Christ... we find ourselves recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ."²

Striving together

Believers must stand fast in defense of the gospel, but, as crucial as that is, there must also be a common struggle to accomplish a goal. As Paul took his pen and wrote "striving together," he may well have thought of the athletic contests he had observed in his many travels. The Greek word used for striving together can be understood as "contending together with" and reminds us that we are not only to stand together, but we are to strive together to publish the gospel to all the world.

The spread of the gospel was violently resisted by Jewish religious leaders during the days of the early church. In fact, Peter and John were threatened, beaten, and commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17-18; 5:40), and Paul said he was forbidden to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved (1 Thes. 2:16).

Today, a growing number of societies and countries are increasingly hostile to the gospel and, like the

religious leaders of Paul's day, they violently oppose any preaching of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ—often by imprisonment or even death.

In 1948, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights adopted Article 18 which states that:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief." However, there is now a petition before the UN to eliminate proselytization in the interest of promoting world peace and harmony and respectful coexistence of all religions. The petition appeals to the UN to adopt an amendment to Article 18 which would read in part, "No individual or organization may seek to convert an individual or a group of individuals...from one religion to another through... mental or emotional coercion."³

Not only is there opposition to the publication of the gospel from outside the church, but there is also distortion in the presentation of the gospel by the church.

A movement in the church called inclusivism influences how missionaries present the gospel to unreached peoples. Inclusivists believe that faith in Jesus Christ is not absolutely necessary, and that some may be saved who have never heard the gospel if they respond positively to the light they have received.

Other distortions of the gospel abound. A veteran missionary uses the Quran to explain the "Korbani Plan of Salvation." Every year, Muslims follow a ritual commanded by the Quran in which they slaughter an animal as the needed blood sacrifice to cover their sins. According to this missionary, the Korbani gives an opening not only to talk about Christ's sacrifice but to share that "Allah's plan was for one perfect person to be sacrificed who would take all sin for all time."⁴

We have been passed the mantle. It is crucial that we stand fast and strive together with one spirit and one mind in the defense and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. ☩

Endnotes

1. Paul Knitter, "Dialogue and Liberation," *The Drew Gateway*, Spring 1998.
2. <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Baar Statement: Christology and Religious Plurality
3. <http://www.petitiononline.com/unchr900/petition.html>
4. <http://www.baptiststandard.com>

Kristi's Story

"I will praise You..."

This is the story of a very special young lady who is a wonderful blessing to our family, and meaningfully touches the lives of those around her. She is unable to speak for herself or express her own thoughts, yet the Lord uses her for His glory. It is our hope that as you read this, you will also consider your own story, and the work that God is doing in your life to bring glory to His name.

A number of years ago, God chose to begin a new life within a fourteen-year-old girl. Certainly, it was a result of her own unwise behavior; but still, in His sovereignty, God decided to bring it about. The baby was born three months earlier than expected, weighing barely two pounds. Her heart and her breathing stopped many times. She survived months of surgeries and other interventions. However, the oxygen needed to keep her alive left her blind and brain-damaged.

This little one required special care that was far beyond the capabilities of a young girl, but she was released from hospital into the care of her birth mother. After 18 months of life-threatening neglect, the baby, Paula, was apprehended by the Children's Aid and placed in an institution for the next four years until a foster home was found.

These early years of neglect and instability took their toll on Paula. She was very confused and emotionally fragile, often biting, scratching, and throwing temper tantrums. She was severely delayed developmentally and was soon discovered to be not only totally blind but also profoundly deaf. She was cut off from everything around her and preoccupied with rocking, hand flapping, and other self-stimulating behaviors.

Her foster family was well-intentioned but was unable to offer Paula the things she needed in order to thrive. The Children's Aid searched unsuccessfully to find another foster home. They had nearly concluded that an institutional setting was best for Paula when they made one final attempt.

Drawn together

A province away, my husband and I were praying about adopting a visually-impaired child. Rick is an eye doctor who specializes in working with multi-handicapped children. We had no idea how to go about doing adopting a blind child, but faithfully read a weekly newspaper column called *Today's Child* that featured hard-to-adopt children.

One day, *Today's Child* featured a beautiful seven-year-old little girl named Melissa, who was both deaf

and blind. When we read that article, we knew the Lord was answering our prayers. We wrote a letter, explaining why we wanted to adopt a child like Melissa. We were delighted when we heard from a distant Children's Aid; and soon we were on a plane.

Of course, Rick, with his experience, had a fairly realistic understanding of what Melissa would be like. But in my mind, I pictured meeting a "normal" seven year old, who just couldn't see or hear.

The little girl we met was nothing like I had imagined. When we arrived at the foster home, we were told her real name was Paula, as Melissa was a pseudonym for the newspaper. We were led to a small, dark room at the back of the house. Paula sat cross-legged on an inner tube, rocking wildly. She was skin and bone. Her face was black and blue from self-abuse. My heart sank when I saw her, and I felt afraid. I made a feeble attempt to take her little hand and talk to her, but she just kept rocking. I tried to gently give Paula a doll I had made but she quickly pulled her hand away. On the third attempt, she threw it across the room. I looked helplessly at Rick. He quietly came and knelt in front of her and began to hum a little tune. He touched her left big toe, and slowly walked his fingers along her left leg and up to her waist. Paula stopped rocking and waited. He walked his fingers along her left arm to her left shoulder then to her left cheek and then gently tweaked her nose. Instantly, a smile broke out on her face; and she reached out her little arms, grabbed hold of my husband's neck, and hugged her new daddy for the very first time.

A new home

At first, Paula was fearful of all the changes in her surroundings. She often would curl up in a fetal position on the floor, and sometimes we would notice silent tears. We soon discovered that this happened at the sounds of the washing machine, the electric knife, the vacuum cleaner, and crying babies. That's when we realized that she could hear, even though we had all the test results that showed she could not. She did not understand anything she heard, but the one thing she did understand was love.

Paula began to blossom before our eyes as she responded to our love for her. Her countenance changed, and the wild rocking and hand-flapping stopped. We never saw the biting, scratching, or reported tantrums. She began to learn language and steadily soaked up understanding of the world around her.

Above all, we wanted her to understand that God loved her so much that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to die for her on the cross. He died so that her sin could be forgiven and she could one day go to heaven to live with Jesus forever. These are very hard truths for anyone to comprehend, but God gave Paula understanding of these things far beyond her mental capacity.

We could observe our little girl responding in love to Jesus who loved her. We could see the joy and the peace in her heart as she memorized Scripture verses and sang along with all our Christian music. (Although Paula cannot make up her own sentences, the Lord has given her the ability to memorize.) So we gave her a new name: Paula Kristi Joy—Little Joyful Christian! Today, we call her Kristi.

But we didn't know if she would really be able to understand about sin and her need for forgiveness. In fact, it was hard for us to show Kristi that she was a sinner, since she never did anything that we could actually point out as sin. Kristi doesn't exercise a will of her own. She does whatever she is told to do and always needs that prompt in order to act. However, we often find her facing heavenward with a glow and a smile on her face that are indescribable.

Joy in heaven

One day, Kristi was sitting at the piano with her big sister, Katie, learning to play a little song. Afterwards, Kristi came and sat beside me. Her head was down and she looked troubled. I was shocked when Kristi spoke a few moments later:

"Mommy, did she press a little hard on the piano keys when Katie was teaching her how to play the piano?" Here she was telling me that she was frustrated about her piano playing. I answered Kristi. "I don't know, honey. Did you do that? I didn't notice."

"Yes, Mommy." Her head hung even lower. "Mommy, should she pray and tell God she's sorry and ask God to forgive her, and then He can think happy thoughts and she can think happy thoughts?"

I answered, "Would you like to do that, Kristi?"

Immediately, she said, "Yes! God? She pressed a little hard on the piano keys when Katie was teaching her how to play the piano. She's very sorry. Would You please forgive her, and then You can think happy thoughts and she can think happy thoughts? Amen."

Her little face beamed with joy. My eyes filled with tears because I knew she understood God's forgiveness and felt the joy of restored fellowship with Him. This was one of the only times that Kristi has expressed her own thoughts. Two other times, we have heard her say, "Let's pray about it," on occasions when she obviously thought we were a little slow to do that!

Since she has been totally blind from birth, Kristi does not have any concept of what things look like. She suffers seizures. She is very vulnerable and relies on someone else to help her with every basic need. But the Lord has given her confidence to face each new day.

The Lord has taught us much through Kristi. We just can't take our eyes off her. It delights us to anticipate her needs and to give her those things that will help her grow and mature and will bring her happiness.

New life for all

We know that you are just as precious to God as Kristi is. Born a sinner, spiritually blind and deaf, yet God reached out to you in love, seeking to adopt you as His own special child. If you have trusted Christ, God is thrilled as you continue to respond to Him. If you have not, there is good news: God still longs for you to turn and embrace Him as your heavenly Father for the very first time. 📖

Kristi sings to herself on her last birthday.



"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."

One Body

The unity of God's people in Old Testament symbolism

"Pentecost transformed a loosely-knit group of cowering disciples into a unified body."

When the Lord prayed for His disciples in the upper room *"that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us"* (Jn. 17:21), they had little understanding of the meaning of His request. But not long afterwards, upon the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they experienced and began to understand the reality of the truth behind these words. It was then that the church was formed—a "new man" according to Ephesians 2:15, the body of Christ on earth connected to its Head in heaven. This event transformed a loosely-knit group of cowering disciples into a unified body that would soon turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Pentecost was, in fact, an answer to His request on the night before His crucifixion.

The unity of the body of Christ—this oneness of God's people—is one of the principal New Testament truths about the church. The Lord referred to it, and the apostle Paul expanded upon it through the divine revelation given him. It is also prefigured in the Old Testament

Scriptures in the life of Israel. Although Israel and the church are clearly distinct entities in Scripture with clearly distinct destinies, there are, nevertheless, striking similarities between the two. These similarities foreshadow the principle of the "one body," reflecting both positional and practical sides to this truth. Both sides—the positional and the practical—are extremely beneficial when understood by the follower of Christ.

Old Testament pictures

From the positional standpoint, when the high priest went into the holy place to minister before the Lord (Ex. 28), the names of all of the sons of Israel were borne upon his shoulders. Their names were permanently etched upon two onyx stones, anchored in gold settings, and fastened by chains of gold (vv. 12-14). Israel was continually kept on the breastplate of judgment over the heart as a memorial for the high priest. Not a single tribe was missing. All were represented. This depicts the unity of God's people (in this case, Israel) and reassured them as their representative ministered on their behalf in the presence of God. Likewise, for we who are living in the light of New Testament truth, it prefigures our security in Christ, kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:5) and sustained both by His ability (the chains) and His affection (the heart). It is this knowledge which reassures our hearts as our great High Priest and representative ministers on our behalf in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24).

As to the one body, Israel was one in the eyes of the high priest. The church is also one body. Paul stated definitively to the Corinthians: *"for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether Jews or Greek, whether we be bond or free"* (1 Cor. 12:13). Every genuinely born-again believer is baptized instantly into the body of Christ upon faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of nationality or any other social or economic difference. Just as Israel was baptized unto Moses and came under His divinely-appointed leadership (1 Cor. 10:1-2), so, too, Christians are the body of Christ even though members in particular (1 Cor. 12:27).



ONE BODY *continued*

Another illustration of the unity of God's people is seen in Leviticus 23, where a loaf was waved in the observance of the Feast of Weeks. This stood in contrast to the individual sheaves used in the Feast of First Fruits which took place prior to the Feast of Weeks. This difference pictured the unifying work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when the individual disciples were baptized into one body.

The oneness of God's people is also seen in other ways in the Old Testament. In Joshua's day, when the ten and a half tribes wanted to obliterate the two and a half tribes for erecting an unauthorized altar (Josh. 22), it required a special envoy to intervene and avert certain disaster. God providentially protected the dissolution of the nation. In His eyes, the nation was one even though the tribes were at odds with each other. The same is seen in the life of David who, when feigning allegiance to the Philistines at Ziklag, is kept from doing battle with his own brethren, even when he suggested it (1 Sam. 29)! God is gracious and intent on maintaining the vital principle of the unity of God's people. It was true in Rehoboam's time (2 Chron. 11:4), and it was even true in Balaam's day when he tried to curse Israel in the wilderness at Balak's bidding. All the hireling prophet could see when attempting to curse Israel was a *"people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations"* (Num. 23:9), in which God had not observed iniquity or wickedness (Num. 23:21). Amazing! How we could all join in with the same remark: *"Oh, what God has done!"* (v. 23).

New Testament practically

Practically, the church should be one body. But what is true positionally may not always be true practically. Again, in writing to the Corinthian believers, the apostle Paul reprimanded them for the divisions that existed in the assembly. Though he would later teach them about the unity of the body of Christ, he had to address the infighting and other manifestations of carnality that clouded their understanding of the principle of the one body.

Just as some in Israel distanced themselves from the other tribes for the wrong reasons (Josh. 1:12-15), so, too, God's people today can distance themselves from other believers for the wrong reasons. This can be for selfish, carnal, and even trivial matters, all reflecting an ignorance of the Word of God. Paul exhorted the Philippian believers to strive together for the faith of the gospel with one spirit and one mind (Php. 1:27). That process, which admittedly takes time, is the outcome of the dedicated work of Christ's gifts to the church: shepherds and teachers who are empowered by the Spirit. They are raised up by God to equip the saints *"for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:12-13). As a result, Christians become mature in the faith and are educated along the lines of biblical truth, while checking personal pride and ambition.

"...what is true positionally may not always be true practically"



In the light of increased false teaching today, it is imperative that Christians be discerning as to the elements of true faith. This requires us to differentiate between *"the precious and the vile"* (Jer. 15:19). Applying the truth of the oneness of the body of Christ and understanding the importance that God places upon it will have a positive impact upon the practical side of our faith and a corresponding effect upon the world around us. In this way, the prayer of our Saviour to His Father will come to pass, and believers will truly manifest the unity of the body so *"that the world may believe."* 🕊

Faith of Our Fathers

The unity produced by Christian doctrine

“Christianity demands confrontation and engagement in the rough and tumble issues of life.”

Western nations celebrate different belief systems in order to accommodate the disparate races, cultures, and people-types that coexist within their borders. In everyday life, politically correct speech and philosophical relativism combine to make people studiously avoid discussing subjects that are the most important to them, thereby averting controversy. Likewise, conventional wisdom advises one to steer clear of discussions on politics, religion, or worldviews, for they almost certainly result in unpleasantness. By abstaining from discussions of strongly held views, the tenuous admixture of divergent groups mostly holds, at least providing the veneer of peace.



Christianity, on the other hand, demands confrontation and engagement in the rough and tumble issues of life. To become a Christian one must deal with the most depressing reality about oneself: one's personal sin and guilt in the eyes of a holy God. Unity is achieved by leveling the field of human distinction. That is, all have sinned, all need the Saviour (Rom. 3:23). People of every kindred, tribe, and tongue are redeemed by the same blood.

They place their confidence in the same Lord. Unity comes not by looking to oneself and one's personal characteristics; rather it stems from adherence to the same body of teachings, known in the New Testament as “the faith” (Eph. 4:5; for other usages of “faith” in this sense see Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 1:2; 4:1, etc.). These doctrines are the substance of Christian belief, linking the saints to Christ their Head, as well as to one another (Eph. 4:13-15).

Defining faith

Of course, faith is a common word, occurring 244 times in the Greek New Testament.¹ Often it refers to belief, such as in God the Father or the Lord Jesus (e.g. Mt. 8:10; Rom. 3:28). Other times, it is used of faithfulness or trustworthiness (e.g. Rom. 3:3, NKJV). While some expositors hold that Ephesians 4:5 refers to the first type of faith, in light of the context, it makes more sense to take it in a third sense.² As Ironside puts it: “This is not the faith by which we are saved, but the faith of the Christian church, the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. It is the one standard of truth that God has given to be proclaimed in the world, it is that which the apostle calls the faith. Faith in Christ is confidence in Jesus, but the faith is the body of the Christian doctrine.”³ It is used in the New Testament approximately 28 times in this manner (although in some of the occurrences it is debatable as to which of the meanings of “faith” is in view).

The content of the faith

The teaching that comprises the faith is multifaceted and covers every aspect of life for time and eternity. Its doctrines begin with the truth that there is one God (1 Tim. 2:5), existing in three co-equally divine persons (Jn. 14-17, etc.). He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Mt. 22:32), who inspired the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as the New Testament writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; 3:15-16; Jn. 14:25; 16:12-14). Jesus is God the Son, as well as the only impeccable and perfect man (1 Tim. 3:16). The Father and the Spirit are also God (Jn. 14:16-17, 23; Mt. 28:19).

The triune God works in complete harmony to work out His purposes in this age and in the

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS *continued*

one to come (Eph. 1:1-14). For example, each member of the Trinity played an integral role in the saving work of the cross: the Father sent (Rom. 8:31-32), the Son shed His blood (Eph. 1:7), and was offered up by “*the eternal Spirit*” (Heb. 9:14). The Father and the Spirit marked out Jesus as the Son at His baptism (Mt. 3:16-17). Similarly, each member of the Trinity is associated with the resurrection of Christ (Jn. 10:18; Acts 2:32; Rom. 1:4).

In Christ alone

The faith also includes the message of salvation by faith in Christ alone (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 15:1-10; Rom 3; Eph. 2:8-9, etc.). This saving work includes justification (being declared right by God), sanctification (being made holy by God, positionally and practically), and glorification with Christ in resurrected bodies (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Rom. 8:11, 17-25). It frees the believer from the tyranny of sin and the doom of future eternal punishment in the lake of fire. It also assures him of the return of Christ to receive His own people unto Himself (Jn. 14:1-3; 1 Thes. 4) and, eventually, to inaugurate His thousand year reign on earth (Rev. 19). Finally, the faith teaches the ultimate triumph and manifestation of God in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21-22).

The faith assures the saints that they are part of the church, the one body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). He is their head and they are members together, having received spiritual gifts for the edification of the body and the glory of God (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4). The church is “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim. 3:15), a lampstand for testimony (Rev. 2-3), a spiritual temple for worship (Eph. 2:21-22), and a vine for bearing fruit unto God (Jn. 15). In short, the church is designed by God to function for His glory primarily and the saints’ good secondarily.

On an individual level, Christians are saved for the purpose of knowing, serving, and pleasing God (Jn. 17:3; Php. 2:13-14). They are to be witnesses to the lost (Mk. 16:15; 1 Pet. 3:15). They are also taught to be diligent and trustworthy workers (Eph. 6:5-6). What is more, believers are instructed to live by a holy ethic (e.g. Col. 3:5-21). In the Christian life, God’s approval is what is sought above all else (2 Tim. 2:15). The truths revealed in the faith demand that saints become living sacrifices for the Lord (Rom. 12:1-2).

“To add human traditions as authoritative is to jeopardize the practical cohesion of the Lord’s people.”



Unity based on truth

The unity of God’s people is centered in the Almighty’s person and will as revealed in the faith. It gives many practical instructions for believers in this age. The substance of the doctrines of the faith is perfectly revealed in the Old and New Testaments; therefore, the saints are to be “people of the Book.” Their sole manual for belief and practice must be the Bible. To add human traditions as authoritative is to jeopardize the practical cohesion of the Lord’s people.

Because the faith is constantly under attack by the world, the flesh, and the devil, Jude 3 exhorts Christians to “...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” It is only as the church defends, loves, and obeys God’s truth that she will maintain true unity. False doctrine is a rapid highway to division (e.g. 1 Cor. 1). The world has long sought a way to unite different races, cultures, and nations. However, only the unadulterated Word of God will bind people of different histories and demographics together. As they are transformed by God’s powerful Word, individuals of varying backgrounds find oneness in their mutual identity in Christ. 📌

Endnotes

1. Maurice Robinson, *Elzevir Textus Receptus (1624): With Morphology*, Electronic ed. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002).
2. It is true that there is only one type of faith that saves: confidence in God’s provision in Christ alone. That is a subjective usage of faith. The objective sense seems to fit better with the “one Lord” and “one baptism.” Many commentators, such as William Kelly agree; see William Kelly, *Lectures On The Epistle Of Paul, The Apostle, To The Ephesians*, electronic ed. (Galaxie Software, 2004), pp.155-156.
3. H. A. Ironside, *In the Heavens : Practical Expository Addresses on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1937), p.178.

One God and Father of All

Finite minds come to the end of understanding.

“We can fall into the trap of thinking we have the Trinity figured out.”

When I sit back in times of contemplation and think about God and who He is, I am often amazed at my own short-sighted visions of Him and His character. As much as I would like to profess that I allow God, through His Word, to completely shape the view I have of Him, I am still bound by this mortal body and finite mind-set. If God is truly God—meaning omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent—then He is vastly greater than what any human mind can comprehend.

I recently read an article by a scientist who was explaining the “self-assembly of the bacterial flagellum.” The point of this article was not to provide scientific knowledge for research but to debate the point of Intelligent Design. He argued that this process happens naturally and automatically. The debate centered on whether this was set in motion by an intelligent designer or guided each step along the way for every one of these cells.

He can set the principles in motion and say, “Keep doing that.” This is what it appears God did when He created the world. He said, “*Let there be light.*” and there has been light ever since. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that He continues to speak and that He “*uphold[s] all things by the word of His power.*” All He has to do is speak and things happen. They will continue to go on until He says otherwise.

At the same time, He also oversees the operation of every molecular development in the universe. We know how He is involved in our daily lives and that He listens to our prayers. He is concerned when sparrows fall and He numbers each of our hairs. Colossians 1:17 informs us that “*by Him all things consist.*” The meaning there is that everything is held together by Him. He keeps the universe running according to the rules that He set forth. He keeps the world from flying apart.

Whenever I read this verse, I think of gravity. Gravity is the force that holds us down on the ground. It is the force that keeps our solar system orbiting around the sun. To some extent, scientists can explain how gravity works. They can calculate the amount of gravity an object exerts on another object. But the one thing they cannot explain is why it works. I see this as God’s hand in action. He is making all things hold together.

In the end, it really doesn’t matter how God actually makes this world work; that is His business. We do see, through His creation, His incredible design. We see His ingenuity, His brilliance and His wisdom. Romans 1 tells us that we can learn so much about God simply by observing His creation. In verses 19 and 20, Paul writes “*Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invis-*

While that is an interesting debate, it really shows a lack of understanding of the extent of God’s omnipotence. If God is all-powerful, He could create bacteria any way He chose.



ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL *continued*

ible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”

We know through His Word that God created all things. Upon further study, we see it was God the Son who actually did the work of creation. Colossians 1:16 says, “*For by Him [i.e. Christ] were all things created.*” That shows the accuracy of this passage in Ephesians 4:6 when it says God is the “*Father of all.*” If He is God the Father and if Christ, His Son, created everything, then He is definitely the Father of all.

The point of Ephesians 4:6, however, is that there is one God. On the surface, this looks like a contradiction to the concept of the Trinity. If there is a Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, how can there be only one God? Of course, the answer is that when we refer to the Trinity, we are referring to the Godhead: the one God in three persons. How does this occur? This is where our limited, finite minds come to the end of their understanding. We can say that it is God manifested in three persons. It helps us with our understanding. Then we consider that it is still one entity and it staggers our minds.

This is the great proclamation of Deuteronomy 6:4: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.*” The word for “Lord” here is the Hebrew word Jehovah: the self-existing God. Next, we see that this word for God is a plural form. What this verse is really saying is, “Jehovah, the triune God, is one God.” Only a God of infinite power and knowledge can express Himself as three persons and still be one God!

In my feeble mind, I imagine God wisely giving us these illustrations and manifestations of Himself so that we can understand Him better. He has shown us three facets of Himself that we can explore and seek to understand. He knows that this is the closest we can get to understanding how the triune Godhead works. We long for the day when we shall know Him completely, when we shall be like Him and see Him as He really is. Then, and only then, will we be able to understand the depths of this marvelous doctrine.

It stands to reason that if He is God, which He is, then we must abide by His rules and come to Him in the way that He prescribes. I often think of this when discussing matters of faith. Many people are under the false impression that they can come to God in the manner of their own choosing. I have often heard the phrase “I believe in a God that....” And then they go on to describe a God who fits their own set of beliefs. The Bible describes this as changing “*the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man*” (Rom. 1:23).

The fallacy of this is that it has no real basis other than in the minds of those individuals. That is why in that same passage it says, “*Professing to be wise, they became fools.*” It is much wiser to seek and find out what the God of the universe says about Himself. We should mold our thoughts and opinions around what He says and not the other way around.

We can fall into the same trap, even as believers, if we are not careful. We tend to think that we have a good understanding of God. We can make ourselves believe we have the whole Trinity figured out. While we are blessed with spiritual understanding from the Holy Spirit that is not given to the natural man, we should never be complacent with our knowledge of God. Even the apostle Paul said his lifelong aim was to “*know Him*” (Phil. 3:10). May we never lose the wonder of the depths of His knowledge and power.

“*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!*” (Rom. 11:33) 📍

“It stands to reason that if He is God, we must come to Him in the way that He prescribes.”





Cypriots, Sorcerers, and Sergius

Explore a few of the many historical evidences from the Book of the Acts.

Here is a quick question for you: Who was the first person Paul led to the Lord? Well, no one knows for sure. Paul most certainly led a number to faith in Christ even before he took his first missionary journey. However, the first one recorded in Scripture took place on the island of Cyprus. It was here that the apostle led a Roman proconsul by the name of Sergius Paulus to Christ.

“Now when they had gone through the island [i.e. Cyprus] to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the Word of God...Then the proconsul believed...” (Acts 13:6-7, 12)

Cyprus must have been an interesting place for Paul and Barnabas to visit. The island was heavily influenced by Greek culture. It was a staging area for all sorts of Roman activities throughout the eastern Mediterranean. And, as the text suggests, it was influenced by the occult.

Their outreach to the Cypriots occurred around AD 47. Luke, the author of Acts, is careful to refer to Sergius Paulus as “proconsul.” This is the proper title for a Roman ruler sitting in authority on Cyprus at that time.

Prior to this, a Roman ruler on the island would have been referred to as a “propraetor.” In 58 BC, Cyprus was annexed by Rome. From that point forward, an appointee of the Roman emperor administered control over the island. In the Roman vernacular of the day, such a ruler would be referred to as an “imperial legate” or “propraetor.”

In 22 BC however, Rome changed the status of Cyprus from that of an annexed territory to that of a full-fledged province. Once a territory became a province, it fell under the authority of an appointee of the Roman senate. As such, a proconsul assumed ruling authority for the island.

“One of the most remarkable tokens of [Luke’s] accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned...Cyprus, for example, which was an imperial province until 22 BC, became a senatorial province in that year, and was therefore governed no longer by an imperial legate (a propraetor) but by a proconsul. And so, when Paul and Barnabas arrived in

Cyprus about AD 47, it was the proconsul Sergius Paulus whom they met...¹



Sergius

Luke is not just accurate in his use of titles. Historians and archeologists have collected evidence for the existence of this particular proconsul.

In 1877, an archeological dig was taking place in the area near ancient Paphos on Cyprus. Supervising the excavation was Luigi Palma di Cesnola. Cesnola had been a Medal of Honor recipient for his efforts during the American Civil War. After the war ended, he was appointed U.S. Consul in Cyprus. Once there, he led a number of excavations. (Incidentally, he would eventually be named the first curator of New York’s Metropolitan Museum.) He located an inscription that proved a proconsul named Paulus did exist. The inscription was in a marble block that was used to consecrate a monument in the first century, and it read as follows:

“Apollonius to his father...consecrated this enclosure and monument according to his family’s wishes...having filled the offices of clerk of the market, prefect, town-clerk, high priest,

EVIDENCES *continued*

and having been in charge as manager of the records office. Erected on the 25th of the month Demarcheusius in the 13th year (of the reign of Claudius). He also altered the senate by means of assessors during the time of the proconsul Paulus.²

The 13th year of the reign of Claudius would be AD 54, or just after the time of Paul and Barnabas' visit. It could be that he is one in the same as the Sergius Paulus who was reached out to by Paul and Barnabas.

Additional evidence for the existence of Sergius Paulus comes from a first century Roman source. Pliny the Elder, as history refers to him, was a Roman naval commander who lived from AD 23-79. He was also a statesman, naturalist, and historian. A good deal of what we know about ancient Rome comes from his writings. Being in such influential positions, he came to personally know many of the important Roman political figures of the day.³

Sorcerers

In his discussions on Cyprus, Pliny reveals one more detail that is pertinent to Luke's account in Acts 13: "There existed different groups of magicians from the time of Moses such as Jannes and Lotape, of whom the Jews had spoken of. And in fact many thousands yearly follow after Zoroastrian ways especially during recent times on the Island of Cyprus."⁴

Here, Pliny confirms the presence of magicians (or what Luke calls sorcerers) on Cyprus in the first century. They were so prominent that he actually gives them a place in his discussion of the island.

Before we leave Sergius Paulus, one more item is worth reviewing. Scripture tells us Asia Minor was the next place Paul and Barnabas journeyed to after leaving Cyprus. In fact, they headed specifically toward Antioch in Pisidia (see Acts 13:13f).

An inscription is on display in the Yalvac Museum within Turkey that was found in the vicinity of Pisidian Antioch. The whole word Paulii and portions of Sergii are visible on it.⁵ It would seem that the family of Sergius Paulus had a large estate in this area. The inscription itself may even be a reference to the proconsul. Maybe Paul and Barnabas headed there at the request of the Roman commander with the hopes of leading his family to Christ!

An inscription related to Sergius Paulus.



image courtesy of www.holylandphotos.org

The exercise we just performed on these few verses in Acts 13 could easily be performed on every chapter of Acts. Luke pays remarkable attention to detail and has yet to be proven incorrect in any facet of his work. The Bible is a book of history. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors of Scripture recorded without error the writings that make up Holy Writ!

Here are some figures that are worth noting about the book of Acts. Luke identifies 110 individuals by name.⁶ Many of these have been verified in history through some extra-biblical source.⁷ In addition, Luke references 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands.⁸ Every one of these has now been located archeologically with certainty, with the possible exception of Phoenix (mentioned in Acts 27:12 as a port on Crete).⁹

Perhaps Sir William Ramsay summed it up best, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense...In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."¹⁰ 📌 —ROB SULLIVAN

Endnotes

1. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1973, p. 82
2. www.bit.ly/BiblePaulus
3. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Books 1 and 2, Volume 1, Translation by H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1979), p.330.
4. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book XXX, Section II, www.bit.ly/BiblePaulus
5. www.bit.ly/antioch-of-pisidia
6. www.bit.ly/thrutheBible-acts
7. Norman Geisler, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), p.270.
8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1991), p.227.
9. www.bit.ly/Acts-credible
10. Sir William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*



Explore many other powerful examples of manuscript-based, archaeological, prophetic, and also scientific evidences to support a strong faith in our day.

One Baptism

A single obedient act is a declaration before God and man.

“God’s glory is displayed in the church by relationships between believers.”

The seven unities in Ephesians 4:4-6 form the basis for the practical expression of unity—that is “the unity of the Spirit.”

This is a unity produced by the Spirit and maintained by believers. This order is important because believers cannot create this unity, but they can preserve it. Positionally, this unity cannot be broken; but practically, it can be disturbed in life. It is maintained by recognizing that the bond holding us together is the peace made in Christ.

There is an extension of the thoughts from chapter 2: the fact that Jew and Gentile have been brought into one body. The word together occurs five times in chapter 2. Jew and Gentile are made alive together, are raised up together, sit together, are joined together, and are built together. There is also an emphasis on the fact that God has made both one. The result is peace both between Jew and Gentile and between man and God.

The context

An overview of the immediate context might help to put these doctrinal statements into perspective.

Ephesians 3:14-21 is Paul’s prayer, but it also expresses the greatness of God. Paul tells of the strengthening of the Spirit, the love of Christ, and the fullness of God. God is working

in us to accomplish far more than we could ever imagine. The purpose of this activity is that the church will display His glory in this age and in ages to come.

Ephesians 4:1-3 expresses the graces that are necessary if unity is to be practically maintained. God’s glory is displayed in the church by relationships between believers. Apart from these graces, individual believers would be ego-centric as opposed to focusing on others. Each believer is responsible to endeavor to keep that unity. This can be done only through humility, tenderness, patience, and love toward others.

Ephesians 4:4-6 gives the ground of unity. There must be facts upon which unity is based, and the seven statements in these verses give that foundation. Jew and Gentile now acknowledge one Lord, adhere to one faith, and profess allegiance to Christ through one baptism.

Ephesians 4:7-16 speaks of the gifts that are given to promote and to express unity in practical ways. The ultimate goal of these gifts and the visible display of unity is seen in 4:11 as unity of the faith and conformity to the person of Christ. Only in heaven will this be fully true, but it is to be our goal and pursuit while here below.

To summarize, there is the greatness and glory of God, the gifts and graces of his people, and the grounds and goals of unity.

Water or Spirit?

Now let us consider the specific unity before us—the one baptism. There is irony associated with the unity of one baptism in that this fact, perhaps more than any other items in this list, has generated a lack of unity. Scholars and commentators are divided as to whether Paul had water baptism or that of the Spirit in view in this particular passage. Good and learned men stand on both sides of the issue. Some scholars feel that whenever



ONE BAPTISM *continued*

water is not mentioned in connection with the word baptism then it must refer to the work of the Holy Spirit. However that might not be true in this passage because the first three facts given in verse 4 are associated with the Holy Spirit and His purpose. The next three items as seen in verse 5 have to do with the Lord Jesus and His person, and the final statement in verse 6 has to do with the Father and His position. This arrangement removes the word baptism from association with the Spirit and aligns it with the person of the Lord Jesus. For this reason, it would seem best to see the one baptism as water baptism or believer's baptism, the act of obedience that follows faith in Christ.

There are other uses of the word baptize in the New Testament such as a baptism of fire, a baptism of suffering, and a baptism by the Spirit. Associated with Jewish ritualism, there is the doctrine of baptisms in Hebrews 6:2. None of these usages of the word refer to the one baptism presented in Ephesians 4.

Method and meaning

Beyond this passage, there is within Christendom and even within evangelical circles a divergence of views when it comes to the mode and meaning of baptism. Some of the differences are as follows: sprinkling or immersion, infants or believers, and household or individual baptism. There are others who hold to the teaching of baptismal regeneration—the view that salvation is not by faith alone but by faith plus baptism.

It is unfortunate that the word baptism was transliterated into English as opposed to being translated. If it had been translated, the mode if not the meaning would be clearer. According to Vine's definition, baptism consists of "the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence." The word comes from the root word that translates as "to dip" and was used of the process of dyeing cloth. Immersion would seem to be the closest English word to express the Greek. Had the word been translated, there might have been more unity on this issue over the course of history. This would have made it difficult for those who practice baptism by sprinkling to maintain their position.

Though the word would be expressed as immersion, the meaning is "to identify with" or "be initiated into." Thus the Lord Jesus was identified in His baptism as the Anointed One as He was publicly inaugurated into



His Messianic office. Also, the children of Israel were baptized unto Moses with a dry baptism because they were being identified with him and with his leadership (1 Cor. 10:2). When believers are baptized, they are baptized unto Christ Jesus, and it is said that they, "have been baptized unto His death" (Rom. 6:3, Darby).

The one baptism is the act of a believer. After professing Christ as Saviour, a Jewish or a Gentile believer is immersed in water as an act of obedience.

Two directions

The God-ward aspect of baptism is a matter of submission or obedience and is the answer of a good conscience toward God. Believer's baptism is introduced in the gospels, practiced in the book of Acts, and taught in the epistles. It is clearly meant to be practiced in the church age. On the basis of this progression, the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper are considered to be ordinances of the church. Baptism, then, is a matter of God's will and a command for those who are saved. The proof of our love for Him is obedience to His commands.

The man-ward aspect of baptism is a declaration of the fact that a person has died with Christ and is buried with Him. The visible act symbolizes the invisible transaction that took place at new birth. It is not stated that baptism is a testimony to the world, but it is that and more. In many cultures, when a person gets baptized, it is understood that they have said good-bye to their former beliefs and attachments and are now publicly identifying themselves with Christ. Baptism is a declaration of identification with the risen Lord.

The order is to believe and then be baptized, an order that no infant or unbelieving child would be able to follow. There is nothing of merit in baptism, so there is no spiritual value in an unbeliever getting baptized. Nor is baptism a requirement for salvation, as seen in the assurance given to the thief on the cross. Baptism is an act that accompanies salvation and a matter of obedience for God's child. The baptism in this passage is one of seven unities that join God's people doctrinally, and it is a practical demonstration of oneness in the body of Christ. ⓘ

A Prayer for Unity

The Lord's words and the reality of church history.

Positionally, Christian unity is an established fact, requested by the Son, granted by the Father, and enabled by the Spirit.

In John 17, we see the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ. Central to that prayer is the Lord's request to the Father concerning Christian unity. We can be assured that the Father would not deny the request of the Son. Yet this passage must be considered in the context of two thousand years of wreckage. Since its inception, the church has been beset with strife, factions, denominationalism, and sectarianism. Even in the Apostolic era, division occurred (Acts 15:39; Php. 4:2; 3 Jn. 9). So how do we reconcile the prayer of the Son with the reality which the church is experiencing to this very day? The answer is simple: Positionally, Christian unity is an established fact, requested by the Son, granted by the Father, and enabled by the Spirit (Eph. 4:4,5). At the same time, in a practical way, Christian unity is denied by the actions of many Christians themselves.

Obstacles to unity

There are a number of obstacles to Christian unity. First, we must admit our own lack of understanding (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). It is beyond the scope of this present article to explore all the reasons why true Christians come to different

interpretations of the Bible. Suffice to say at this point that true and earnest Christians do sometimes have differences of opinion with regards to some of the teachings of Scripture.

Sometimes these differences are minor; at other times, these differences are more serious. This is made worse when the truth is pursued with a greater dogmatism than is warranted while ignoring the biblical teaching on humility.

But for all the ways in which unity can be affected through a differing interpretation of the Scriptures, the flesh is the greater danger. Human beings seem prone to having a party spirit about almost anything, and this attitude carries over into the church. One man holds to a theory of dubious veracity but makes the adoption of his views a test of personal loyalty. Family ties intrude into the debate. Small men would rather lead a faction in denial of Christian unity than admit even the possibility of being wrong. Perhaps an example of this is Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:2, for Paul pleads with them to have oneness of mind without providing corrective teaching. Evidently, this was a personality conflict rather than a doctrinal conflict. So, through the flesh, the work of the devil proceeds.

Any unbiased examination of the history of the "Brethren Assemblies" will provide ample demonstration of these facts. Personality conflicts masquerade as doctrinal conflicts. Men study a matter over a period of years and then insist that everyone else immediately accept their position. Some take a point which is so subtle that the average saint is unable to understand the problem and use that to split a worldwide fellowship. What began in the full joy of recovered truth descended into a party spirit every bit as denominational as the denominations around them. Yes, the truths of the New Testament church are very precious, for they are precious



A PRAYER FOR UNITY *continued*

to the Lord Jesus Himself; but they are not proof against the excesses of the flesh.

The teaching of John 17 is both complex and balanced. We must acknowledge that there are limits to Christian unity. The Lord's prayer in John 17:11 includes the statement, "*that they may be one even as We are.*" Our unity is based on truth rather than on falsehood. At the same time, John 17:23 says, "*that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me.*" A practical unity based on truth should not exclude the majority of the true Christians in the world, or we are denying the validity of the Christian faith. Even the unbelieving world has this figured out. When they see two factions who each claim to follow Christ fighting, they don't side with one of the two factions; they choose neither faction and walk away from the hope of salvation.

Practical unity

So how do we balance a desire to hold to the truth with a desire to show unity among believers? The answer is easy in the stating but hard in the living: We show Christian unity by seeking whatever fellowship we are able. There are some believers with whom we have complete practical unity. On every matter, both large and small, we think alike. So we have real Christian unity with each other. But the challenge in this sort of situation is to have a unity centered in Christ and not just a unity in our common opinions.

There are others with whom we hold in common all essential truths. They may be in fellowship in our own local church or in another local church of like mind. While there are some differences on minor matters, we have happy fellowship. The key challenge here is to not let our differences become irritants between us. If we do not take steps to consciously safeguard these relationships, they will deteriorate. It seems we sometimes express the harshest opinions of those who are the closest to us in doctrine, but this must not be the case. We need to foster fellowship with each other, spend time with each other, and show hospitality between each other so that the relationship between us will grow.

There are also those whom we acknowledge to be Christians who think very differently than we do on major matters. They believe the gospel and their salvation is not in doubt, but we believe them to be in major

"The key challenge is to not let our differences become irritants."



Corey Hochachika

doctrinal error. Can we still have fellowship? Can there still be a practical Christian unity between us? Yes, there can be unity because Christ

has established that unity. Maybe I cannot regularly attend their church, but can I visit it? Maybe we cannot break bread regularly, but can we do it occasionally if opportunity presents itself? It would be shameful to avoid breaking bread if I cannot find a church which is in complete agreement with my doctrine. Maybe we can't in good conscience break bread with them, but can we at least listen to a sermon with them? Perhaps we can't listen to their sermons, but can we at least cooperate in spreading the gospel? And if we cannot have any ecclesiastical unity with them, can we at least invite them to our homes to spend an evening talking about the goodness of our Lord? Here the challenge is to seek whatever practical expressions of unity are possible, without allowing ourselves to compromise in our fundamental beliefs.

Finally, and most controversially, can we have fellowship with those who call themselves Christians but who in all likelihood are not saved? Under some limited circumstances I would say yes. For example, I might work together with them in showing mercy to the poor or in fighting the horrors of abortion. In a strict sense, we cannot have Christian unity, for they are not saved. But if they profess the name of Christ, I cannot instantly cut them off completely.

No doubt there will be objections to the practical expressions of Christian unity discussed in this article. But the objections will probably come from both sides of the argument. Some will feel I have erred in not having enough fellowship with true Christians. Others will feel I have erred in not holding fervently to the truth. That's fine. I accept both criticisms. Each person reading this article must seek his own balance. But above all else recognize that Christ has already accomplished Christian unity. It is an established fact. And to live in practical denial of this reality would be a shame. 🕒

One Hope

In the twinkling of an eye

“Certainly Christians are on our way to heaven. But that is not the focus of the Bible’s record of our future.”

Ephesians 4:4 assures us that all Christians share one glorious hope. That isn’t to say that we all realize that or even agree on it. But it remains true whether all believers agree on it or not. The verse begins by informing us that there is only one body. That is why our hope must be shared. When the Lord returns to take the church to be with Himself, we won’t be sorted on the basis of our previously-held prophetic schemes. We’ll all be caught up together. One body, one hope.

We look forward to this event as the rapture and, hopefully, we expect that it could come at any moment and we live in accordance with that hope.

What takes place at the rapture?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 details the order of events at the rapture. But other passages expand upon our understanding and enlighten us as to some of the consequences.

The defeat of death. *“O death, where is your victory? O grave, where is your sting?”* (1 Cor. 15:55). These two questions are not merely parallelism; they form a duet. When the Lord returns for His own, the dead in Christ shall rise first. As they do so, their great shout of triumph will be, *“O death, where is your victory?”* And then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet them in the air; at that moment we, whom death never had a chance to

claim even temporarily, will respond, *“O grave, where is your sting?”*

The transformation of the believer. *“when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is”* (1 Jn. 3:2 NASB). Beholding Christ automatically changes us to be more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). But today there are obstacles that obscure our view, and so the transformation is gradual and incomplete. We can be frustrated with our lack of growth. But take heart! At the moment of the rapture, *“we shall see Him just as He is”*—without distraction or obstacle. As a consequence, *“we shall be like Him.”* This will be no partial transformation; it will be complete. And it will not be gradual; it will all take place in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye.

The consummation of our salvation. Although we have already entered into the good of our salvation, the Bible speaks of a future aspect of many of the blessings we presently enjoy. Once we have been raptured, we will enter into the fullness of our salvation (Heb. 9:28), sanctification (1 Thes. 5:23; 1 Pet. 1:5), adoption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:5), redemption (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), conformation (Rom. 8:29; 1 Jn. 3:2; Php. 3:21), and glorification (Php. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15).

The importance of the rapture

There are those who accuse doctrine of being impractical. But we note that the Bible consistently links the rapture to consequences that are both practical and profound.

Persistence and patience. Taking seriously the imminent return of Christ strengthens and challenges us to *“be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Cor. 15:58). A consciousness of the rapture enables us to keep going when the road gets rough. *“You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand”* (Jas. 5:8).



Comfort and encouragement. After describing the rapture, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to “*Therefore comfort one another with these words*” (1 Thes. 4:18). When confronted with the injustices and suffering of this present world, how refreshing it is to look ahead to the glories that will follow!

Godliness and holiness. John tells us that if we take seriously the promise of perfect conformity to Christ in the future, we will experience growing conformity in the present. “*And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*” (1 Jn. 3:3). Believing that our Lord can return at any moment encourages us to live carefully, lest we “*be ashamed before Him at His coming*” (1 Jn. 2:28).

When is the rapture?

The timing of the rapture has been the subject of much debate among Christians. It isn't the point of this article to enumerate the many biblical reasons for believing that the rapture will occur before the tribulation. But two points are worth keeping in mind.

We don't know when it will be. Much ridicule has been brought upon Christianity by those who announced a specific date for the return of Christ, only to see that date come and go. But there are many who would never set a specific date who nonetheless feel compelled to suggest they know at least a general time period. But the Lord Jesus explicitly stated that not only don't know the exact dates of end-time events (Mk. 13:32), it is not for us even to know the times or seasons (Acts 1:7).

It could be at any moment. “*You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (Jas. 5:8). The imminent return of Christ for the church is the consistent teaching of Scripture. This is crucial. If we believe that years of tribulation must precede it, then we cannot say it is at hand, it would hardly be the current encouragement the Bible presents it as (since it would require horrendous suffering first), and its incentive to godly living would be greatly diminished (since we would have years of warning of our Lord's return).

The main point. There are many excellent reasons for looking forward to the rapture. We look forward to an end of suffering. We look forward to an end of sorrow. We look forward to an end of sin. But the main reason for the rapture is even more important than these. You might have noticed that although we've talked about the what



and why and when of the rapture, we haven't talked about the where—where will we go when we're raptured?

It's interesting that the Bible doesn't use the phrase “going to heaven.” Certainly Christians are on our way to heaven. But that is not the focus of the Bible's record of our future. Consider these key verses about the rapture and notice what the Lord emphasizes about our destination.

“*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (Jn. 14:3). “*Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 Thes. 4:17). “*Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him*” (2 Thes. 2:1).

Our future is a person, not a place.

When I was away at university, I eagerly looked forward to getting home. There were many good reasons for that. Certainly my parents' house was far more comfortable (and aesthetically pleasing) than the orange and green 10-foot cube I lived in at university. And don't get me started on the food. But as I was taking (enduring?) the long bus ride north, it wasn't the house or the meals that made my heart burn for home (as wonderful as they might be). My real motive for getting home wasn't what was there but who was there.

Is that what motivates us to long for our Lord's return? It's fine and even noble to desire a removal of suffering, sorrow, sickness, and sin. But does our desire to see Him eclipse all of other motives?

Just before going to the cross, our Lord did something He rarely did: He expressed His own will: “*Father, I will that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am*” (Jn. 17:24a). In unspeakable grace, having us with Himself is the hope of the Lord Jesus. May this be our blessed hope, too! 🙏



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The word *Anosognosia* was constructed by French neurologist Joseph Babinski in 1914 from two similar sounding Greek words: *nosos* meaning “disease” and *gnosis* meaning “knowledge” plus the negative prefix *a-* and refers to a person who is unaware of the disability from which they suffer.

“Are We Blind Also?”

Some are telling us that black is the new white.

Anton–Babinski Syndrome is a rare form of Anosognosia. It can evidence itself when damage occurs in the occipital lobe of the brain from a stroke or blunt force trauma to the back of the head, causing blindness. But then something unexplained happens.

According to one of the world’s leading neurologists, V.S. Ramachandran, it is not only the visual cortex that allows us to see. In fact, about 30 distinct areas of the brain are involved. These regions contribute to our seeing color and shade, movement, form, texture, distance and depth. Linked to these are stored “files” indicating what these objects mean to us. One malfunction, called Prosopagnosia, or Face Blindness, allows a person to recognize every other object but human faces. Sufferers not only cannot recognize the faces of loved ones, but even their own image. It seems face recognition is so important to our consciousness that there is a unique part of the brain dedicated to this one significant function.

It’s hard to believe, but those suffering from Anton–Babinski Syndrome not only convince themselves that they can still see, they give patently bizarre explanations to try and cover up their obvious missteps. According to neurologist Macdonald Critchley:

...not only [does] the patient ordinarily...not volunteer the information that he has become blind, but he furthermore misleads his entourage by behaving and talking as though he were sighted. Attention is aroused however when the patient is found to collide with pieces of furniture...and...describe people and objects around him which...are not there at all (“Modes of reaction to central blindness,” 1979, p. 156).

The New Atheists seem to be suffering from a spiritual form of this syndrome. They are blind not only to the revelation of God “clearly” displayed in creation (Rom 1:20) but to every other thing of value in the cosmos. As Richard Dawkins writes: “The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference” (*River Out of Eden*, p 133).

After healing the man born blind in John 9, the Lord had this to say: “*For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind. Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, Are we blind also? Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, We see. Therefore your sin remains*” (vv 39-41). The Pharisees suspected that the Lord’s miracle was in fact a parable and that He was making the point that they were also blind: “*Are we blind also?*”

Ah, said the Lord, blindness is not the problem. This man was blind and I fixed him. Your problem is deeper than that. You *are* blind, but you have convinced yourselves that you can see (note the “*we know*” statements). As long as you pretend, how can I help you? Their “*sin remains*” not for being blind, but for claiming their darkness to be light. No surprise that one of the New Atheists, Daniel Dennett, thinks a better name for atheists is “brights.” He writes, “We brights don’t believe in ghosts or elves or the Easter Bunny — or God.”

But the Lord Jesus has the last word: “*If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*” (Mt 6:23). Even “brights” could come seeing if they acknowledged their darkness and came in believing faith to the One who is the true Light (Jn 9:5). 🔴

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