
The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXIII : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:4~6 —

beynge one body and one sprete even as ye are called in one hope of youre callynge. Let ther be but one lorde one fayth one baptism: one god and father of all which is above all thorow all and in you all. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

There is one body, and one Spirit, euen as yee are called in one hope of your vocation. There is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptisme, One God and Father of all, which is aboue all, and through all, and in you all. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (King James Version, 1769)

one body and one Spirit, according as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (Revised Version, 1885)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (American Standard Version, 1901)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (New King James Version, 1982)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (New International Version, 2011)

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (English Standard Version, 2011)

ἓν σῶμα καὶ ἓν πνεῦμα καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἷς κύριος μία πίστις ἓν βάπτισμα εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν ὑμῖν. (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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FORMAT — Paul makes an abrupt change at this point of his argument. Some observations:

- Paul had just expressed the unity of those within the Lord's congregations by using the term 'the unity of the Spirit.' He now emphasizes that unity through a series of seven acclamations of oneness.
- These seven acclamations fall into two groups of three, concluding with an acclamation of the one God with its own fourfold repetition of the word 'all.'
- Several commentators noted the sequence of thought moves from the Lord's congregation to the Lord, then to God Himself (e.g., Salmond, Abbott, Hoehner, Lincoln). I am not sure these acclamations may be so divided; while Paul does start with 'one body', the second triad includes 'one faith' and 'one baptism' which I would relate to the Lord's congregation.
- There is an advancement which centers on the trinity: the first triad speaks of the Spirit, the second triad speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, then 'from Christ to God who is One in the highest and most absolute sense — the One source of life and good in all His people, the one to whom both Christ and the Spirit are related. The third triad marks the climax, for God is the one unifying factor in both testaments.' [Salmond, 322; Hoehner, 518]

NOTE THE ABSENCE OF ANY CONJUNCTION — While almost all versions smooths the translation in v. 4 by the insertion of 'there is...', Paul makes this abrupt change without a conjunction. "Normally, Paul introduces a new section with a conjunction to indicate how it relates to what has been said. One would think that a conjunction like 'for' would have been appropriate here because of the relationship of verses 4-6 to verses 1-3, that is, the basis or reason for the unity just mentioned." [Hoehner, 514]

WHY THE USE OF THE REPEATED ‘ONE’ — Several reasons for Paul’s repeated use of the word ‘one’ are given by the commentators, most of which is not satisfying to my mind. The closest to my own understanding is related by Ernest Best: *“Everything then goes to support the view that 4.4-6 is a carefully designed list and, since only parts of it are appropriate to the context of Ephesians, it was a list which [Paul] inserted because part of it was useful to him. In addition the effect of the repeated use of ‘one’ is to drive home his central theme, unity.”* [Best, 372] I will expand on this thought in the next point.

PAUL IS NOT GIVING ‘ABSOLUTES’ BUT MERELY EMPHASIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY — We must be careful not to miss Paul’s major emphasis as we try to determine what each of these acclamations mean. I want us to discuss the different opinions and I believe it important to at least try to understand Paul’s thoughts, but not at the sake of overlooking Paul’s emphasis. For example, Paul says there is ‘one body,’ but Scripture clearly speaks of many bodies:

- **most obvious is our physical body:** *‘And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.’* (Matt 10:28 NKJV)
- **the Lord’s Table element as a picture of the broken body of Christ:** *‘And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”’* (Lk 22:19 NKJV) *‘The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?’* (1 Cor 10:16 NKJV)
- **our old Adamic nature:** *‘knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.’* (Rom 6:6 NKJV)
- **our future resurrection body:** *‘It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.’* (1 Cor 15:44 NKJV)

Another example is ‘one Spirit’ yet Scriptures speak of many spirits:

- **the Holy Spirit:** *‘When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him.’* (Matt 3:16 NKJV)
- **our human spirit:** *‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’* (Matt 5:3 NKJV) *‘Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’* (Mk 14:38 NKJV)
- **demonic spirits:** *‘When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.’* (Matt 12:43 NKJV) *‘When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!”’* (Mk 9:25 NKJV)
- **the spirit of the dead:** *‘But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit... “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”’* (Luke 24:37,39 NKJV)

Paul will speak of ‘one baptism’ yet Scriptures speak of many baptisms:

- **water baptism:** *“‘The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’”’* (Matt 21:25 NKJV)
- **a metaphor of the trials of Christ:** *‘But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”’* (Mk 10:38 NKJV) *‘But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!’* (Luke 12:50 NKJV)
- **the baptism of the Holy Spirit:** *‘I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’* (Mk 1:8 NKJV) *‘for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’* (Acts 1:5 NKJV)
- **a baptism ‘into Moses’:** *‘Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea’* (1 Cor 10:1,2 NKJV)

“The style now changes abruptly.... It is [best] to take vv. 4-6 as preparation for what is to follow in vv. 7-16 and as continuing the theme of unity which is already present. Before [Paul] begins to discuss diversity within the church, he stresses its unity.” [Best, 466] *“Paul does not develop the particular areas of oneness, but simply lists them: body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father. His focus is on the oneness of those and every other aspect of God’s nature, plan, and work as a basis for our commitment to live as one.”* [MacArthur, 129]

PRACTICAL – WHAT WE BELIEVE, WE BELIEVE WITH OTHERS — *“Christians must maintain the unity of the Spirit because everything they hold of any significance they hold with other people. Seven items are preceded by the word ‘one,’ and in each case the oneness expresses both the uniqueness of the item and its foundational value for unity. All seven express the reality that there is only one gospel and that to believe that gospel is to enter into the unity it creates. Christianity is a shared faith. No separate or merely individual faith exists, nor is there a different salvation.”* [Snodgrass, 198]

DIVERSITY WITHIN UNITY — *“The section serves as a theological basis both for the practical admonitions to unity in 4:1-3 and for the emphasis on unity amid diversity in 4:7-16. The sevenfold repetition of the number ‘one’ shows the importance of the unity that Paul appeals to his readers to pursue in 4:1-3, but the diversity within this one God (Spirit, Lord, and Father) and the diverse ways in which his unity finds expression (body, faith, baptism) reveal that God’s unity is nevertheless expressed in the kind of diversity that Paul will describe in 4:7-16.”* [Thielman, 256]

NOT A TREATISE ON THE TRINITY — Though this contains the terms ‘Lord, Spirit and God the Father,’ it should not be taken as a deliberate Trinitarian formula. This may have been more likely if ‘Lord’ and ‘Spirit’ had headed their triads and the order had been ‘Father, Son, Spirit.’ But we should also remember we are looking back after 2000 years of church history; the Trinitarian order was probably not yet fixed. Note the order in 1 Cor 12:4-6:

*‘There are diversities of gifts, but the same **Spirit**. There are differences of ministries, but the same **Lord**. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same **God** who works all in all.’* (1 Cor 12:4-6 NKJV)

The reason for what we would consider to be a reverse order is because the context, both here and in 1 Corinthians 12, is the unity and gifts of the Spirit. Thus it is natural to begin speaking of the Holy Spirit. Other elements between the terms also speaks against any idea of a Trinitarian formulation. *“Yet even if our formula was not deliberately Trinitarian, it strongly influenced the language of later creeds, particularly those of the Eastern church.”* [Best, 359]

WAS THIS A WIDELY USED CREDAL FORMULA? — Several regard this in some fashion as an early creed:

“The theological importance of these subjects, that they number seven (a significant number in Judaism and early Christianity), the skillful repetition of the three genders for ‘one’ in 4:5, the lack of any main verb, and the lack of any conjunction linking 4:4-6 to the previous paragraph — these features have led many interpreters to see an early Christian credal formulation here, either in its entirety or in part.” [Thielman, 255f]

*“This section has the nature of an early Christian *credo*, not unprecedented in the Pauline writings, but more elaborate than its predecessors. ‘To us,’ says Paul in I Cor. 8:6, ‘there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’ This binary *credo* is followed, later in the same letter, by a triadic pattern of words, framing ‘the same Spirit ... the same Lord ... the same God’ (1 Cor. 12:4-6). So also the wording of Eph. 4:4-6 is built up around ‘one Spirit ... one Lord ... one God.’”* [Bruce, 335]

While Paul’s triads do have rhythm and purpose, I agree with those who doubt or deny this to be such an early creed:

*“There is discussion whether and to what extent traditional credal formulations are quoted in vv 4-6. The oneness of the basic elements of the faith is set out in a series of acclamations, which at the same time serve as reminders to the readers of what they already know. **Despite the sevenfold nature of these acclamations, it is highly unlikely that vv 4-6 as a whole are a confession or hymn composed by [Paul] or that they constituted an earlier unit which has simply been incorporated here. Although they are difficult to reconstruct with any certainty, it is more likely that behind the passage lie one or two pieces of credal material that [Paul] has taken up in his own rhetorical stress on unity.**”* [Lincoln, 228]

*“It is impossible to determine the role such a formula would have played in the early church for very little is known about its life and worship, and **the distinctions which for analytical purpose we draw between liturgical, credal and catechetical material may not have been so apparent to the early Christians who would have used the same material for very different purposes.** Baptism is too minor an element in the formula for us to be sure it was a baptismal hymn or confession or that it was used in catechetical instruction, and ... v. 6 would not be appropriate to this end. **The statement is designed for internal Christian usage rather than to help non-believers to clarify the distinction between Christianity and their religions.**”* [Best, 359]

“On the other hand, it may have been used as a confession after the Ephesians had received and read the letter. There is certainly nothing inherently wrong for Paul to have quoted a hymn or confession, but many NT scholars are much too eager to designate as hymns those portions that seem to have some sort of meter.” [Hoehner, 513f]

One of the difficulties in accepting this as an early creed is the use of the second person ‘you’ in verse 4b:

‘just as you were called in one hope of your calling’

It must be remembered Paul dictated his letters (with the possible exception of Galatians, Gal 6:11) as was the custom of his time. Perhaps as he dictated, what we might consider today to be an early form of a creed came to Paul’s mind (or rather, was brought to Paul’s remembrance by the Holy Spirit) and Paul adapted it to meet his current need. And equally likely is the possibility others used this as they themselves developed their creeds.

WHAT IS A CREED? — A creed is defined as follows:

‘A creed, or Rule of Faith, or Symbol, is a confession of faith for public use, or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of belief, which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian Church.’ [Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol 1 p3f]

The oldest known accepted creed is known as **the Apostles' Creed, ca. 390 AD:**

*I believe in God the Father Almighty.
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
Who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary;
Was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried;
The third day he rose from the dead;
He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
And in the Holy Ghost;
The Holy Church;
The forgiveness of sin;
The resurrection of the body (flesh).*

It should be noted this creed was modified unto the presently received form. This came into general use in the seventh or eighth century (the differences in this creed will be further commented upon when we get to vv. 7-10):

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, [Maker of heaven and earth].
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
Who was [conceived] by the Holy Ghost, [born] of the Virgin Mary;
[Suffered] under Pontius Pilate, [was crucified] and buried;
[He descended into Hell {Hades}];
The third day he rose from the dead;
He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of [God] the Father [Almighty];
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
[I believe] in the Holy Ghost;
The Holy [Catholic] Church;
[The communion of saints];
The forgiveness of sin;
The resurrection of the body (flesh).
[And the life everlasting]. [both creeds from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol 1 p21f]*