

Today we are continuing our study of Ephesians.  
We are in a section that deals with the unity of the church.  
In Ephesians 4, Paul wrote 16 verses on this issue.  
Now, why would he do that?  
Is the unity of the church all that important?  
And the answer is YES.

Church unity is crucial because the salvation of untold millions of people depends upon it.  
Christ has entrusted the church with the world's most important mission and that is the great commission.  
In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said to his disciples:

**Matthew 28:18** “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

This is our mission.  
And to fulfill this mission, **we have to be unified.**

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, Saint Cyprian famously said: “The church is our mother.”  
And this makes sense because **where would any of us be without the church?**  
How would you have become a Christian or grown as a disciple without the church?

Through the ministry of the church, our faith is born and our walk in discipleship is nurtured.

Healthy churches produces healthy Christians.  
And if Satan can disunify the church, if he can get us to **bicker** and **divide** or be non-committal to one another – then he knows he can greatly hinder the mission of disciple making.

God is our Father, the Church is our mother and satan wants nothing more than to cause a divorce.

And so here in Ephesians 4, Paul hammers away at the crucial topic of church unity.

So let us read Ephesians 4:4-6:

**Ephesians 4:4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

**Say:** This is God's word.  
The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.  
**Pray.**

In Ephesians 4, Paul devotes 16 verses specifically to the issue of church unity.  
And here in verses 4-6, he gives us, rather poetically, 7 ways in which we are unified.

Now certainly there is significance in the number he chose.  
7 is a number that represents completion or wholeness.  
And so in listing 7 ways we are unified, he is indicating that we are **perfectly** and **completely unified.**

The ways he lists are quite comprehensive.  
They are 7 broad categories that serve to illustrate our unity.  
The first 3 we have already considered: **One Body, One Spirit, One Hope.**

And now we come to **One Lord.**

A sermon outline is available on our website, as well as an entire worship order.  
If you haven't done so, it may be helpful to print that out- it will help you follow along.  
And our first point is...

## I. One Lord

As believers we are united in the truth that we all have one Lord.  
And this refers to the fact that we are all submitted to the same "one authority" in the church and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

To quote Paul in Colossians 1:18:

**Colossians 1:18** And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

To be pre-eminent means to surpass all others.

And Christ is **Preeminent in everything** which means **he surpasses all others in every way.**

This applies especially to his Lordship or his authority.

In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as "the Lord" so often that it is difficult to count all the instances.  
The number is probably over 400 times.

And so, after the title Christ, "Lord" is Jesus' most popular title in scripture.

This title is so frequently used that we can easily become numbed to its significance.

Yet the bible makes it clear that Jesus' Lordship is absolute.

There is no created thing or person who is not under his authority.

And when we consider the implications of this, we quickly discover that this is not naturally how we want the universe to run.

In our cultures and in our day and age, we like to think of ourselves as sovereign over our lives.

We are our own masters.

We are our own personal Lords- or so we like to think.

Yet the bible makes it clear that Christ is Lord and this is true whether we embrace his rule in our lives or not.

After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, Peter preached to a great crowd in Jerusalem.

And the final point he made in his gospel proclamation was this:

**Acts 2:36** Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter didn't close by saying, "Invite Christ into your life and let him be your personal Lord."

On the contrary, he informed the crowd that Jesus is indeed Lord and that his Lordship is true whether we receive him or not.

And a Christian is one who bows in faith before the Lordship of Jesus **in this life.**

I use the words "in this life" very intentionally because everyone will eventually bow before Christ's Lordship.

The question is, are we going to bow before him in this life, and receive grace and mercy, or will we bow in the next life, where there is only justice?

In Philippians 2:8-11, Paul wrote:

**Philippians 2:8** he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is no created person- no angel, no demon, no man or woman who will not bow to acknowledge Christ's Lordship.

Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him as Lord.  
So let me ask you before we go any further: Have you done this? And do you still do this?  
Have you submitted your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and received his sacrificial death on your account?  
There is no more important question that we can ask ourselves.

Now the Church is the fellowship of those who have bowed the knee to Jesus **in this life**.  
We confess that we have one Lord.

And when there are disputes or disagreements in the church, it is then that we most need to remember his Lordship.

I'm not the Lord. You are not the Lord. Christ is.

Now Christ has set up church government and leadership structures in the church, but every authority is to be submitted to his Lordship.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:1:

**1 Corinthians 4:1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

You see, Paul's conception of leadership in the church is one of service and accountability.

Leaders aren't to see themselves as the authorities in the church but rather as servants who are serving under Christ.

And they are to serve as Christ served- with patience, love, humility and always speaking the truth.

The fact that the church has One Lord means that we have an awesome opportunity for unity because he has the ultimate authority.

He is the one whom we seek to honor and obey.

And the way we know how to properly honor and obey him as Lord is in his Word.

There are all kinds of disagreements that can arise in the church- and the question we must first ask whenever there is a dispute is: "What does God's word say?"

God's word speaks directly about so many issues.

And on those occasions when it does not speak directly to an issue, we can rest assured that it always speaks to our **attitudes** towards one another.

Most disputes in the church can be easily resolved when we are submitted to Christ and his word.

When our highest aim is to honor him, disputes are quickly resolved.

Now if you have been in the church for very long, you can think of examples where Christians just could not agree.

Sometimes the disagreements have been so sharp that one party felt it necessary to break fellowship and leave the congregation.

And this is sad when it happens.

I believe if we were all submitted perfectly to Christ and his word, such breaking of fellowship would never occur.

And so it is our calling to recognize Christ's singular lordship in his Church and to seek to honor and obey him. In this we are unified.

The second way in which we are unified is that we have...

## **II. One Faith.**

Now faith is a bit of an ambiguous term.

It could refer to the entirety of the Christian religion.

This is how it is used in **Acts 6:7** where Luke writes that many became obedient to "the Faith."

In the history of the church there have been several attempts to summarize “the faith”.  
For instance, the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds, or the Heidelberg Catechism, or the Anglican Church’s 39 Articles or the Westminster Standards.  
These were all attempts to summarize “the faith” meaning the Christian faith.

And while these may be useful, this is not “the faith” that Paul is referring to.  
Another possibility for understanding “one faith” is to suppose it refers to the subjective act of belief that all Christians participate in.  
This “one faith” could be “one act of believing” that every Christian does.  
Yet, this is too unspecific and subjective to really unify the church.

So what does Paul mean when he writes of “one faith”.  
I believe he is speaking about that most essential faith.  
The only faith that really matters and that is **saving faith**.  
The “One Faith” is trust in Jesus Christ as savior.

There are so many doctrinal differences among Christians.  
This was true even in Paul’s day.  
But there is one most essential faith that all Christians must have in order to truly be called Christians.  
And that is faith in the crucified and risen savior.  
Trusting in him alone for salvation.

It is possible to believe all kinds of correct things about the Christian faith and still not have saving faith.  
And it is also possible to believe all kinds of errant doctrines- doctrines taught nowhere in Scripture- and yet still have that essential saving faith.

Paul summarized this saving faith in Ephesians 2:8:  
**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved, through faith.

In Romans 3:28, Paul Says:  
**Romans 3:28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

In Galatians 2:16  
**Galatians 2:16** ... we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ ...

Again, a person may have all kinds of errors in their doctrine and life and yet if they have this most essential ingredient, this saving faith, then they are indeed saved.  
So the “One Faith” Paul speaks of is that faith in Christ as savior.

And this truth has all kinds of implications for unity in the church- because the church is made up of people who have realized that all of their works earned them nothing before God.  
Our right relationship with God, our standing in righteousness is nothing less than an absolutely free gift to be received by faith alone.  
And this should create a church-wide attitude of humility, thankfulness and worship.

Because we are all saved **through this one faith and nothing else**.

It is as though we were all formerly beggars, and the king invited us to his house to live forever as his children.  
He cleaned us up, gave us beautiful clothing to wear and sat us down at his banquet table to eat the best of foods.  
All of us have been taken from destitution to a seat at the kings table.  
Now, in that scenario, **how inappropriate would it be if one of us started to brag?**

If one of us started to think that we had somehow earned our position or that our goodness or loveliness somehow contributed to us being invited?

What would you say to such a person if they started to pat themselves on the back or have a sense of superiority? You'd say: You did nothing to deserve this!

None of us did.

The only reason any of us are here is because of the sheer grace of the king!

And this applies to us as a church.

We are the people of one faith, which means we recognize that we have contributed nothing to our salvation and therefore we are in no way spiritually superior to anyone.

There is one faith- and this means there is no other way to be saved except through faith in Jesus Christ. And this should fill us all with humility, thankfulness and praise.

Finally, Paul tells us that there is...

### III. One Baptism

Baptism is one of two sacraments that Christ gave to his church, the other being the Lord's supper.

And Christ gave us these sacraments in order to signify and represent to us His saving work.

They are meant to be a blessing to us, a reminder and a means of grace.

And one of the most tragic truths surrounding the sacraments is how divided the church is in understanding them.

The sacraments are meant to represent our union with Christ and with one another.

And yet historically, the sacraments have been a primary point of division in the church.

How tragic.

And so as we go to scripture to understand what baptism represents, let do so in a fresh way by considering a passage that is not often mentioned.

In **1 Corinthians 10:1**, Paul writes about the Israelites who followed Moses out of Egypt.

Listen to the way he refers to baptism.

He writes:

**1 Corinthians 10:1** For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...

Now Paul's reference to baptism here tells us a great deal about how he understands baptism.

The Israelites who followed Moses, who were delivered with Moses as their leader, who lived like him, who ate and drank like him- these Israelites are said to have been **"Baptized into Moses"**.

And this paints a vivid and accurate picture of what baptism really is.

Baptism means to be linked and unified with the one we are baptized into.

The Israelites were baptized into Moses which means that whatever happened to Moses, happened to them.

Whatever was true of Moses became true of them.

And when we are baptized into Christ, our baptism represents our union with Christ.

It symbolizes that whatever happened to Christ is what has happened to us.

Has Christ died?

Yes, and we have died with him in baptism.

Has Christ been raised? Yes, and we are raised with him in baptism.

Baptism symbolizes our union with Christ.

Hear the words of Paul in Romans 6:3-4:

**3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4**  
We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Our death and resurrection with Christ are represented to us in our baptism.

Baptism is a wonderful and beautiful sacrament.

It is multi-faceted which means it communicates to us a volume of truths.

It represents to us our ingrafting into Christ, our forgiveness of sins, our faith and repentance, our justification, our adoption, our eternal life and more.

Baptism represents **all the benefits of Jesus Christ coming to us.**

Now, to be clear, Baptism does not cause these benefits.

The benefits of Christ are not tied to the timing or act of baptism.

Because it is not baptism that saves- it is Christ who saves through faith.

And baptism represents our union with Christ and his benefits to us.

So as we think about our “One Baptism”, let us consider what we are doing now that we are baptized.

Because it represents our union with Christ.

Are we living as those who have been united to Christ?

Are we walking in the newness of life that our baptism represents?

Are we living in the freedom that is fitting for the children of God- children that are loved, accepted, forgiven by God!

Children that have a future and a hope!

Does your baptism define how you think about yourself right now?

***Because baptism is not ultimately a statement about what you think about Christ.***

***It is ultimately a statement of what Christ thinks about you.***

And in our baptism Christ would have us know that we are his.

We are united with Christ in baptism- and if united with Christ, then united with one another.

Therefore we must love one another and strive for unity with one another in the church.

Amen.