

Ephesians

An encyclical letter from the heart of CHRIST
through the heart of Paul to the heart of the Church of all time

by

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

UNITY, INDIVIDUALITY, DIVERSITY, TOTALITY

IN THE OPENING SENTENCE of the fourth chapter of this Epistle, the Apostle has been urging upon those to whom he was writing the duty of a consistent life, and exhorting them to give diligence to **"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."** And now he proceeds to state the sevenfold basis of that unity. And incidentally he suggests to us the way in which it may be realized. It is indeed by recognizing and contemplating the spiritual realities which he declares to be at the heart of the unity that we may achieve it.

What is the seven-fold basis? What are the great spiritual realities which underlie spiritual unity? They are stated in categorical simplicity in the next sentence.

"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" (vv. 4-6).

"One body." In what sense was that true when the Epistle was written? Well, it was not true in the sense of ecclesiastical organization. So far as we know, every church was independent of every other church. There is no evidence of any attempt having been made at a system of federation.

There was a certain prestige attaching to some churches, but there was no final authority to which all must bow, and there was no stated form of organization to which all must conform. Jerusalem, as the capital city and the temple center, as the residence of the apostles and the home of the mother church, had a certain measure of prestige, but the Jerusalem church made concessions to the opinions and convictions of other churches.

The church at Antioch was unique among the assemblies in that from that body missionaries first went out to the Gentile world, but Antioch seems to have given place subsequently to Ephesus and finally to Rome. So that the Church was not one in the matter of ecclesiastical organization. And the Church was not one in the matter of a uniform belief. The acceptance of a common creed is sometimes the basis of fellowship, but there was a wide variation of belief in the Church

of Paul's day. Some of the church epistles are directed to the correction of erroneous beliefs. Even in single organizations we see evidence of faction (I Corinthians 1:10-11).

If, then, the Church was not one in the matter of organization or belief, in what did her unity consist? It was an inward and spiritual unity of those who had a common relationship to the Head. It was the unity of a people whose spiritual relationships were expressed in the terms which the Apostle employs. Let us put them together.

- One body animated by one Spirit,
- sharing one hope,
- acknowledging one Lord,
- confessing one faith,
- sealed by one baptism,
- and recognizing one Father of all.

And that unity is true for all time. We do not have to seek to secure the unity of the Body. The Body is one. And all those of whom the foregoing is true constitute the Body.

This one Body is animated by one Spirit. Every body is animated by some spirit; it is the spirit that animates the body. Perhaps we may say with some confidence that the spirit of man is the breath of GOD (Genesis 2:7). The word rendered "**breath**" in the creation account is not "*pneuma*"; nevertheless man became a living organism when GOD breathed into him the "**breath of life**." And the Church is a living organism in virtue of one Spirit. The Church does not speak a uniform spiritual language; her interpretations of revealed truth include almost innumerable differences of point of view. But there is one Spirit, and one common testimony to the person of CHRIST. That is the acid test (I John 4:1-3).

"**One Spirit**." There is always a condition of derangement if there is more than one spirit in one body. The man who had become possessed by a legion of demons was deranged. His personality was in a state of insurrection. He was a civil war within a single soul (Mark 5:1-9).

But the Church is not that; the Church is one body animated by one Spirit. And observe again that this is not some ideal to be attained. These are spiritual realities. We cannot make them any more real than they are, but by recognizing them we will help to "**keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**."

There is also "**one hope**." What has the Apostle in mind when he speaks of one hope? The hope of the Christian and the hope of the Church are spoken of in many terms in the Scriptures. Paul speaks in two places of the hope of "**eternal life**" for the believer (Titus 1:2; 3:7); and in a letter to Timothy he speaks of JESUS CHRIST as "**our hope**" (I Timothy 1:1); the second advent of CHRIST is spoken of as "**that blessed hope**" (Titus 2:13); the present subjection of the creature to vanity is "**in hope**" of deliverance "**from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God**" for "**we are saved by hope**" (Romans 8:20-24).

The apostle John speaks of the ultimate conformity to the likeness of CHRIST as "**this hope**," and the "**glory of God**" as the all-encompassing hope of every believing heart (Romans 5:2). GOD is glorified in bestowing eternal life; He is glorified in JESUS CHRIST; He will be glori-

fied in the apocalypse, in the deliverance of creation, and in the final conformity of all believers to the likeness of CHRIST. All this constitutes the "**one hope.**"

There is also "**one Lord.**" There can be only one allegiance in the body of CHRIST. There are "**gods many, and lords many,**" but to us there is "**one God, the Father, of whom are all things . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things**" (I Corinthians 8:5-6). The church that does not recognize the Lordship of CHRIST is not the true Church (Philippians 2:9-11).

Let us remind ourselves again that this sevenfold unity of which the Apostle is speaking is not something that we are to seek to produce, or bring about. The spiritual facts of which he is speaking are independent of us; we can neither make them more or less true, but by recognizing them we may help to preserve the unity of the Spirit. And he places the one Lord in the center of the group.

"**One faith.**" The allegiance to one Lord expresses itself in the terms of faith. And let us recall in this connection that the special burden of the Epistle is the declaration of the bringing together into one body of Jew and Gentile, of the privileged and unprivileged on common ground. And what is it that constitutes the uniting link? First of all, "**one faith.**" Christians are not all spiritual children of Israel but they are all spiritual children of Abraham (Romans 3:29-30).

Faith does not always express itself in the same doctrinal terms, but there is in the heart of the Church, and in the heart of every believer, a conscious certitude with reference to CHRIST that cannot be gainsaid. And that spirit of faith unites men together in the one Body.

He lists also in this spiritual category "**one baptism.**" To what baptism does he refer when he declares that there is one baptism?

The church at Ephesus was one of the assemblies to whom this circular letter was sent. When we turn to the nineteenth chapter of Acts, we see that some of its members had submitted to more than one baptism. They had been baptized into "**John's baptism,**" but after Paul had conversed with them they were "**baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**" (Acts 19:1-5).

But it will be noticed that the subject uppermost in the thought of Paul was the HOLY SPIRIT. The conversation takes us back in thought to the first chapter of Acts, where the Lord JESUS is conversing with the disciples. He bids them to wait for the promise of the Father, and then He says, "**For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence**" (Acts 1:5). The "**one baptism**" would seem to have reference to the baptism of the Spirit. It is in agreement with this that we read that "**by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body**" (I Corinthians 12:13).

But if that be so, it may be asked, when did the baptism of the HOLY SPIRIT occur? Someone may say, "On the Day of Pentecost." We certainly have the highest authority for that statement. But someone else may say, "Did not the Gentile church receive the baptism of the HOLY SPIRIT in the house of Cornelius?" Both answers are correct, but neither answer may be complete. The baptism of the HOLY SPIRIT would seem to be a perennial administration of the Spirit.

The Church of every age is always, and at all times, immersed in the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit is a continuous operation of grace which is effective for the entire body. The church at Corinth had not participated in the outpouring of the Day of Pentecost, nor had they been present at the house of Cornelius, but nevertheless they had been baptized into one body.

And finally, **"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."**

There is a difference of opinion as to whether **"through all"** may have the sense of "pervading" all or of "operating through" all, but we will not be far wrong if we interpret the entire expression this way;

- **"Above all"**: transcendence;
- **"through all"**: providence;
- **"in you all"**: immanence.

And once more, observe how the doctrine of the Trinity emerges in this Epistle again and again.

"But." And now in these next sections we have the completion of a series of contrasts which extend from verses 4-13 and fall into four parts, which are characterized by four numeral adjectives.

In verses 4-6 - One: unity.

In verses 7-10 - Each one: individuality.

In verses 11-12 - Some: diversity.

In verse 13 - All: totality.

He has been speaking of the Church as a whole; now he is about to speak of the Church in its parts. He has been speaking of the Church corporeally; now he is to speak of the Church as to its members individually and severally.

"But unto every one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (v. 7).

It is according to the sovereign disposal of Christ; according to the measure which He measures out to each one.

There is a corresponding passage in the Epistle to the Romans: **"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"** (Romans 12:3).

At this point the Apostle turns aside to quote from Psalm 68.

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men" (v. 8).

The Psalm is an exultant song of triumph. The historical occasion which called it forth is not

known. Some think it commemorated the carrying of the Ark to Zion; some, that it celebrated a military victory. In the very heart of the composition the writer exclaims:

"Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them" (Psalm 68:18).

And the Apostle relates those words to the ascension and exaltation of CHRIST. He led a host of captives. Does he not refer to the liberation from the power of the grave of those who arose when He arose (Matthew 27:52-53)? He took into captivity to Himself those who had been under the dominion of death, and captives of the tomb. But in this triumph He received gifts for men; indeed, the triumph and ascension of CHRIST would seem to have released these gifts for the Church. (See Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13 for the same word.)

The next sentence brings in the thought of the diversity. In verse 7 it was **"every one"**; in verse 11 it is **"some."** This is the third numerical adjective.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (v. 11).

Having bestowed gifts upon the Church, He now bestows the men He gifted upon the Church. He gave some to be apostles and some to be prophets. These two stand at the head of the list, and the offices so expressed seem to have been peculiar to the first generation of Christians.

The apostles were, perhaps without exception, men who had personally seen the risen Lord and had received a commission directly from Him (I Corinthians 9:1). The prophets were a special order of men, who addressed the assemblies for edification and exhortation and comfort. (Acts 19:6; Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 12:10. See also I Corinthians 14). They seem to have spoken under a peculiar influence of the Spirit.

Chrysostom says of them that they spoke under the influence of inspiration and in animated style, and under irresistible impulse taught the Church. But after the written Scriptures of the Apostles came into general circulation, the office of prophet seems to have been withdrawn. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers certainly continued to exercise their gifts in the Church.

"For the perfecting [equipment] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ" (v. 12).

This is the present objective of the exercise of every gift within the Church, but it looks forward to a consummation which can never be fully realized while the Church is incomplete. And so he continues:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect [full-grown] man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13).

Here is the last of the four numerical adjectives. **"All."** Totality.

This is the ultimate objective to which GOD is working - the complete Body, the full-grown Man. And into that mystical Body will be poured the fullness of CHRIST; and to that mystical Body will be contributed a fullness of humanity. And that reminds us that at present the completed Church does not exist.

Each successive generation witnesses segments of the Church being called out from the mass of humanity; we see the church of the first century and the church of succeeding centuries; we see the African church and the Indian church and the European church, but the Church as a complete body is not yet. What infinitely wonderful purposes may GOD have in mind for the Body of CHRIST! Surely He has a mission for the Church in the universe at large when she is complete. What will it be? What kind of service would her present training fit her for? To whom will she go?

But the contemplation of the final realization of the ideal brings the thought of the Apostle back to the members of the Body as they now are, and his thought takes a very practical turn.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive (v. 14).

The Apostle does not seem to have been an imaginative man, nor to have lived very close to nature, but sometimes he employs telling metaphors. He sees a boat drifting on the ocean, the sport of the storm. It rises and falls with the waves which dash across the deck. But as you look more closely the heartrending thing that you observe is that it is manned by children. They play about the deck; they come to the sides and watch the gathering storm; they dip their fingers playfully into the waters which at any moment may become their liquid grave. Children!

"Carried about," he says, **"with every wind of doctrine."**

- Here is the gentle breeze of Christian Science that wafts men onto the Beautiful Isle of Nowhere;
- here is a gust of Russelism that would transport men to a land where every sunrising is a millennial dawn;
- here is a hurricane of heresy, shipwrecking faith;
- here is a storm of Satan uprooting the plantings whose roots were dry.

But Satan works through human agencies, and so he changes the metaphor. **"By the sleight of men";** literally, "in the dicing." It suggests to us a game of chance.

That is how some people come by their religious beliefs. It is a "toss-up." Yes, but it is not all chance. There is a man behind the counter who loads the dice. **"Cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."** Behind every deceitful error there are deceitful men, and they are the emissaries of the Father of Lies.

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (v. 15).

Physiologically the figure may not be literally accurate, but he means to express at least this: There is a reciprocal and co-ordinated unity in the Body of CHRIST, and the members are to derive both direction and nourishment from the Head.

"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (v. 16).

That is a complicated statement, but it takes us back to the declaration in verse 4: **"there is one body."** He says that **"the whole body"** through the effectual working of every part is increasing and building up, and all its direction and empowering is from the Head. But **"every joint"** has its part and place.

~ end of chapter 11 ~

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