Opening Words

There is only one Body that experiences God's salvation. There is not a Body of Jews and a separate Body of Gentiles and then among the Gentiles a Body of Blacks and a Body of Whites and a Body of Hispanics and a Body of Asians. There is one body.

53 Eph Unity Comes from the Work of God

In our previous broadcast, we talked about the more than adequate foundation we have for unity with our brothers and sisters when we consider the nature of God's oneness and the nature of God himself. When we consider that there is one God who is over all and through all and in all, one Lord who is Jesus – crucified, raised, and enthroned for us, and one Spirit who incorporates us into the Body of Christ, then we will go a long way to putting aside our petty squabbles and uniting with others in our local church and even across churches as we realize that it is by God's grace that we are part of one family and one body.

This is such an urgent topic for us. Jesus prayed that we would be united. In John 17 he prayed

> "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

And here in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus he urges Christian unity from many different angles. Let's read our passage again and we'll finish our thoughts on it today.

> 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.

Paul mentions four parts of our Christian experience and uses the word "one" with each of them. He says there is one faith, one baptism, one body, and one hope. Let's examine each of these.

This will cut right across the grain of the spirit of our age, but there is only one faith. Another way we might put this is – there is only one salvation, one way to salvation, and one Savior. Paul uses the word "faith" as a synonym for what people loosely call "religion." Of course, there are many religions, but Paul is saying there is only one true religion in the same way that there are many gods that people worship, but there is only one God. Sometimes people use the word "faith" in this way. Some will say "I am of the Muslim faith", another "I am of the Buddhist faith," but Paul says there is only one faith.

In the Anglican Church, the king or queen is considered to be the earthly head of the Church and he or she in receiving the crown is called to be "the keeper of the faith." But modern voices, in keeping with the spirit of the age are saying that the new monarch should say "the keeper of faith" or "the keeper of the faiths." Both phrases are an attempt to undermine the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ.

Paul says there is only one faith. I am reminded of the passage in Jude 1 where Jude says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."

And so, when Paul talks about there being "one faith" he means that there is only one true God and one kingdom and one way to enter this kingdom and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that whereas Jude's purpose in writing his verse was because of outside pressure upon the church to compromise, Paul's purpose in writing his verse in Ephesians 4 was because of inside pressure for the church to splinter into different factions, and he reminds everyone that there is only one faith. When we think of the enormous challenges the Church faces today from the culture around us and the challenges of the needs of the world that only we can properly address, then we better think long and hard about the dangers of disunity and the absolute necessity of oneness within our churches and across churches.

Paul says there is one baptism. What does he refer to here? Does he refer to Spirit baptism whereby all true believers are baptized into the Body of Christ? If he does then 1 Corinthians 12:13 would be a great verse to explain this. In that verse Paul said: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." We see in this verse similar terminology: the word "one" and the mention of the Spirit, the body, and baptism.

While Paul probably had Spirit baptism in mind, I cannot help but think that he also had in mind water baptism. Now hold onto your seats. I'm not advocating baptismal regeneration that has plagued the Church and given false assurance to so many people who think that just because they are baptized they are saved. I'm saying that in the first century, when a person wanted to express his faith in Christ he was baptized. Baptism, in first century cultures, was the normal means by which a person expressed faith in Christ. A person would go into the water, confess his sins, call upon the name of the Lord and acknowledge Jesus as his new Lord, and would be baptized. This is why Ananias said to Paul in Acts 22:16, "Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name." Did the water really wash away Paul's sins? No. But this was a symbolic way of talking and acting. It was faith in the finished work of Christ that saves. The way Paul and others expressed their faith was through baptism.

This is what Paul had in mind in Romans 6 when he said that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death. Therefore, we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. Our baptismal faith places us into the body of Christ whereby the merits of his death, resurrection, and enthronement become ours. Salvation is wholly of the Lord. Salvation comes to us through faith alone and not by faith plus works. And first century faith was demonstrated by baptism in which a person would call upon the Lord and would receive the Spirit at the same time.

I believe this is what Paul had in mind in Ephesians 4 when he said there was one baptism. But why did he emphasize that? It is because there were several different kinds of baptism going on in the

first century. There was proselyte baptism. When a Gentile wanted to enter fully within the covenant God made with Abraham, he was circumcised, then he was baptized. Second there were baptisms and washings in the Qumran community, sometimes called the Essene Community. This is the community that gave us what we know today as the Dead Sea Scrolls. They had many purification rituals for their own members to prepare them as a holy community for the great battle of the end time. Then there was the baptism of John which was important for a season but with the coming of the Messiah and his death and resurrection and his command to baptize in his name, it became unimportant. Then, in the Gentile world there was a type of baptism in the mystery religions that supposedly brought people into union with their gods. So, you can see, there were many baptisms going on in the first century, but Paul said, "really, there is only one baptism because it is not the gods of the mystery religions that will save you and it is not the washings of Qumran that will help you or proselyte baptism into Judaism and its keeping of the Law that will help you. The only baptism that will help you is your incorporation into Jesus and His body for only he died, rose, and was enthroned for you.

Paul says there is one Body and in this expression of Christian experience we find one of the greatest foundations for Christian unity. Earlier in his epistle Paul went to great lengths to explain the alienation between Jew and Gentile. Jews were in the covenant but Gentiles not. Gentiles were separated from the Messiah, excluded from Israel, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, through Christ Jesus and his work on the cross, Gentiles have been brought near to God and with Jews are one body in Christ. Paul says that by Christ dying he can "reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross."

This union of Jew and Gentile into one body becomes a paradigm by which warring races can find unity and peace. Christ's death on the cross, his grace to all people, and his means of salvation that is the same for everyone is the foundation for unity. There is only one Body that experiences his salvation. There is not a Body of Jews and a separate Body of Gentiles and then among the Gentiles a Body of Blacks and a Body of Whites and a Body of Hispanics and a Body of Asians. There is one body.

If there is only one Body, then we must live that way toward one another. With the person we don't care for, the person who offends us, the person who believes differently on a minor issue, the person who has a different diet, they are in the Body as well as us. They were baptized into Christ. They have embraced the one faith. They are following the one Lord. They are indwelt by the one Spirit. They are headed to the one throne of God who is over all, through all, and in all.

Finally, Paul says there is one hope of our calling. We have seen what that one hope is. It is the hope of Christ's return where we will be perfectly conformed to his image and where we will reign with him. That person you don't get along with – he or she will one day reign with Jesus Christ. That person that annoys you or that is so opinionated will one day be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ and his annoying behavior will cease. And by the way, so will your annoying habits and dare I say it – my annoying habits too. I'm glad my annoying habits will end because I am becoming more and more aware of them and I don't like them either.

It will be great when hope and faith become sight and substance. With this glorious destiny in front of all of us – let's love one another and be united with one another.