

One Church: One Faith

Ephesians 4:1 through Ephesians 4:6 (NKJV)

¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Series Introduction:

What does God have in store for Greater Friendship? What does God want to accomplish through Greater Friendship?

I cannot tell you that I have a vision for us just yet. Right now, I do know is this: we won't get anywhere divided.

So this seven week series is designed to draw all of us in. We want to cross barriers. We want our hearts on one accord. We want to create singleness of purpose and unity of spirit. We must become One Church in Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 4 Paul tells the believers about seven things that are unique in the church. We will examine each one in hopes that they will turn all of our heads in the same direction and cause our eyes to all behold the same glory of God.

In the first week we began with One Church: One Body. In that message, we were encouraged to acknowledge the head. We were also encouraged to accept one another. Lastly, we were told to find our place in the body. Next, we talked about One Church: One Spirit. In that message we learned some critical truths about the Holy Spirit. We talked about his purpose, his presence, and his power. Then, we talked about One Church: One Hope. We learned that we have one eternal hope in Jesus Christ. Last week, we discussed One Church: One Lord. We learned that we have one Lord who is master, owner, and authority to the church. Today, we will discuss One Church: One Faith.

Introduction

In this series so far, we haven't spent much time sharing the history that makes this passage come alive. Today, I ask that you are patient with me as I share some insights with you.

During the time that Paul lived, it is believed that Ephesus was probably the fourth largest city in the world. It lay between two rivers and was a great port city where goods, people, and ideas were always passing through. It had a large Jewish population so Judaism was well established there. It was the center for the worship of the Greek fertility god Artemis. The Romans identified Artemis with their god Diana. The Greeks and Romans were both polytheistic, meaning they worshipped many gods.

Religiously, for the Jews, a person was justified by doing the works of the law. The Greeks were more philosophical and looked at achieving happiness through intellectual processes, and social rules. But here comes Paul, teaching how salvation was by faith, not the works of the law. He taught about fulfillment through faith, not philosophical debate or mental exercises. On Paul's third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus for three years setting the record straight.

Later when Paul writes to the church at Ephesus he is helping the church to deal with pressures they were facing from the outside. On one hand, the Jews are trying to say the gentile believers had to follow the law to be holy. On the other hand, the Greeks' polytheism is being imposed on the church.

Paul tells the church:

⁴*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;*
⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

He is basically saying: "In the midst of all of the confusion, know what you believe. Don't water down your faith. Don't trade your faith in for cheap substitutes. You are saved by grace through faith and not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.

There is one faith. I want to be like Paul today and tell you ...

Keep Your Faith Holy.

Galatians 1:6 through Galatians 1:9 (NKJV)

⁶I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

The issue that Paul is dealing with here is called heresy. Heresy is any opinion or doctrine not in line with the accepted teaching of a church. Our English word for heresy is derived from a Greek word which has the basic idea of *choice*. Choice is good but it is a purely selfish choice for what people want to believe.

Galatians 5:19 through Galatians 5:21 (NKJV)

¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

In this passage Paul says heresy is a work of the flesh. The real danger is that we may mingle ungodly ideas into our belief systems and then become confused in our faith. We can't add the Easter bunny to Jesus. Jesus stands alone. We can't add Mormonism to Jesus. We can't the Jehovah witnesses to Jesus.

As I visit the Auburn District, the Southeast District State Convention, and the Alabama State Convention of Missionary Baptists, I find that this issue of co-mingling of beliefs is a hot topic. There is a feeling of loss of clarity, structure, and foundational principles due to the ready availability of other faith examples.

What do I mean? We have members in our churches who don't know what the Baptist church stands for, but have already embraced the beliefs of ministries they see on television, the internet, and at conferences around the country. Larger, more dynamic, and experiential ministries have had a greater impression on church goers than their own memberships.

There are a lot of factors that have lead to this but no one side of the issue is completely clear of charges in the matter. On one hand the ministry of the Baptist church didn't keep up with technology and failed to address the differences in doctrine. Instead, we preached against it and criticized all of it failing to see that we had lost credibility in the eyes of the people.

On the other hand, our members just went with the flow. They didn't recognize how those new ministries would impact them. So now we have members who are confused, clergy who are frustrated, and churches that have lost their identity.

My question today is; have we done the same thing to our faith? Have we been guilty of running after whatever looked or sounded good? Have we become more faithful to

our traditions than to our God? Have we been guilty of preaching some other gospel, some other good news? Are we losing our relevance while we play it safe in the ministry?

We have one faith. One faith has one message. There is only one "good news". There is only one hope or our calling. If we don't know what we believe and we have not embraced one faith, then people can lead us astray.

Keep your faith secure.

Boy on the roof story:

One night a house caught fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flame, smoke, and blackness. As can be imagined, he was afraid to leave the roof. His father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy protested, "Daddy, I can't see you." The father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

How many of you would have jumped? We are a lot like that boy. Life is burning the house down. Circumstances are choking us like smoke. We need to jump to safety but can't see our way to the Father.

In order to take that leap to life and safety we have to be fully convinced that the Father will catch us. How do we do that? We do it by securing our faith.

Hebrews 11:1 through Hebrews 11:2 (NKJV)

¹Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ²For by it the elders obtained a *good* testimony.

Hebrews 11:13 (NKJV)

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Hebrews 11:32 through Hebrews 11:40 (NKJV)

³²And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of

weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, *in dens and caves of the earth.*

³⁹And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

How convinced are you? The hall of Faith is filled with people who were so convinced that they lived, performed miracles, and died for a promise they couldn't obtain. God says they still obtained a good report.

I believe we often fail to serve the Lord because we are not convinced about God. God may desire that we participate in ministry with him. He may call us to be in the choir, or serve as an usher, or as a Deacon or Trustee. God may be calling us to join the dance team or the transportation committee or the Missionaries.

We won't do it or we will half do it because we are not convinced. We won't serve because we don't believe God is who he says he is. We won't give our best because we don't believe God is worth it. We were only doing our service for the church and the church isn't worth it. We were doing it for ourselves and we don't feel like it.

How persuaded are we? That's what faith is. It is persuasion.

Are we persuaded enough to believe God will speak to us? If he speaks do we have enough conviction to do what he says? Are we convinced enough to give our lives completely to him? We still sit on the thrones of our lives, knowing the prophets and knowing the stories but we are not yet persuaded. We are not convinced that hell is a reality. We are not yet convinced that it can happen to us. We need to be convinced that the price for our salvation has been paid. Some of us are still too self righteous to be convinced that we need a savior.

If we are not convinced, we will operate like we are not convinced. We will react to life's circumstances like we are not convinced. We will live like we are not convinced. We will serve like we are not convinced. We will sing like we are not convinced. We will pray like we are not convinced. We will witness like we are convinced.

God didn't call us to a faith like that. We have been called to a faith that can subdue kingdoms. It can raise the dead. It can quench the violence of fires. Our faith can stop the mouths of lions.

Take your faith out of the box.

The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The animals will not jump if they cannot see where their feet will fall.

We need to get our faith out of the box.

Faith is flawless. Faith is limitless. Faith has power to deliver from death to life. The limit on the faith is the person who believes. The same was true for the Law. Romans 7 and Romans 8 explain how the Law was perfect but we were broken. Often the same is true for our faith.

Faith in God is a spiritual function. It is not a mental exercise. Faith happens in the inner man. Because faith is spiritual, it has the potential to accomplish whatever God ordains for it to do. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God. So when God speaks, our faith is activated. Our faith releases the Holy Spirit to operate on our behalf.

So when God speaks the word to repair the broken places in our lives it is our faith that must engage to release the Spirit to do his will. When God speaks for us to be delivered from bondage, we must have faith in his word and believe him for the power of the Spirit to be manifest in our situation. That's why it's good for believers to have a storehouse of word within them. It gives the Holy Spirit something to work with.

But remember, God's word will go forth to accomplish whatever **he** desires. Remember that in Isaiah he says his word will not return to him void but it will accomplish his will. It's his will not our wills. That's why we can't take the word and use it like a set of spells to get what we want. We must be listening for the word that God will speak to our spirits deep within us.

If God has spoken into our spirits that he will bless our marriages and keep us together, it is then our responsibility to act in faith. We need to serve our spouses in faith. We need to show intimacy in faith. Regardless of how things look now, we must be convinced of God's word to us.

If God has promised to provide and has spoken into our lives, then we need to fill out job applications in faith. Even if we aren't qualified for the positions, God's word to us cannot return void. It will accomplish whatever he has ordained for our lives if we just have the faith.

Conclusion:

We have one faith. The church has only one persuasion. We must hold fast to one Gospel message and share one story to bring others into faith in Jesus Christ. It's time for us to go beyond believing bits and pieces of religion. We gather fragments from the media, from the fables we hear, and from superstitions. But our faith is built on the word of God. One church must have one faith to convince the world for Christ.