

# Ephesians 4:4-6

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## Introduction.

It would be an understatement to say that the modern religious landscape is a confused one. There are thousands upon thousands of different churches and denominations out there, ranging in size from world-spanning monoliths that have captured the allegiance of hundreds of millions, to house churches with 15 or 20 people. Each one of these nominally Christian organizations claims Jesus as its Lord and claims to be obeying Him.

Some people view this immense diversity in the realm of the believers as a good thing. They think of it as a big spiritual buffet for God's people. If you like to speak in tongues and jump around while supposedly possessed by the Holy Spirit, there's a church for you. If you like a fancy high-church service with pipe organs and clergy in fancy robes and burning incense, there's a church for you. And probably, if you want a fancy high-church service that's periodically interrupted by people jumping around and speaking in tongues, there's a church for you too. Observers like this applaud all of this religious chaos, because it lets people find a church that makes them happy.

The problem is, though, that when we put the focus on making ourselves happy, we take the focus off of making God happy. We may claim Jesus as Lord, but if we organize churches based on what we want, the true lord we are serving is ourselves. We see man's plan for Christianity in the world around us, but we see God's plan in His inspired word. Consider the words of Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6. What this passage tells us is that all of that multiplicity of religious choice ought not to exist. Instead, religiously speaking, there is only one way that God wants us to be.

This is not a popular message in today's religious climate. Far too often, the people around us want to do what they want to do, and when we suggest that it's not what God wants them to do, they get offended. Ultimately, though, Christianity is not about what we want, but what God wants. Let's see what His will is as we study Ephesians 4:4-6.

## Body, Spirit, Hope.

Perhaps the most direct rebuttal of the all-churches-are-equally-OK point of view is found in the first phrase of this passage, where Paul tells us that there is **ONE BODY**. If we aren't familiar with Biblical language, we might find this to be a difficult idea to grasp. However, Paul explains what he means in the same letter, in Ephesians 1:22-23. When Paul says that there is one body, he means that there is one true church. Of course, Paul here isn't using the word "church" to refer to a particular group of believers who have come together on one particular Sunday morning. He's not talking about a local church. If he were, we'd all be in trouble, because this local church wasn't even in existence for Paul to write about! Instead, he's using the word "church" to refer to the total number of the disciples of Christ, Christians from every place and every time, who will one day assemble around the Father's throne in heaven—that is, the universal church.

Now, this might seem to give support to the every-church-is-equally-good crowd. After all, if there is such a thing as the universal church, can't all the different sub-churches around just be part of that universal church? We see the problem with that point of view on the screen behind me. According to this passage, Jesus is the head over all things to the body. That means that He tells the body what to do, and the body obeys Him, just like our bodies obey us. If some church isn't doing what Jesus says, logically it cannot be part of the body. We'll see how important this is as we move on.

Just as there is this one body, though, so too there is **ONE SPIRIT**. At first glance, we might just assume that this is talking about the Holy Spirit and move on, but Paul's meaning is more complex than that. We get a glimmer of what he's talking about in Romans 8:14. Now, there are two main senses in which the word "Spirit" is used in Scripture. First, it's used to talk about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. Second, though, it's used to talk about an attitude or a direction, the same way that we use the word when we talk about having "a spirit of boldness." Paul actually means both of these things simultaneously. Just as our bodies obey the will of our spirits, so too the body of the church obeys the will of the Holy Spirit. We are animated by a spirit of obedience that causes us to behave in righteous ways and marks us out as children of God. In the first century, Christians learned the will of the Holy Spirit when their prophets were inspired by the Spirit to teach them. Today, we learn what the Holy Spirit wants as we study the record of those teachings in the Bible. When we follow what the Bible tells us to do, we show that we are led by one Spirit.

If there is one direction in which the Spirit is leading us, there must also be one destination to which the Spirit is leading us. That's why there is **ONE HOPE**. Peter describes precisely what that hope is in 1 Peter 1:3-4. As Christians, it's important for us to remember this. We live in a very materially rich country, and it's easy for us sometimes to forget that earth isn't heaven. The thing is, though, that someday, every one of us is going to lose every earthly blessing we have. Our possessions will pass to someone else, our hobbies will be things we can't do anymore, our families and friends will depart, our health will fail, and our lives will end. If we hope in any of those things, we will be disappointed. However,

the Christian's hope of heaven is certain. Regardless of what happens here, if we remain true to the Lord, we will have an eternal life of blessing with Him. Though it is wonderful to serve Jesus here, that hope is why we are His disciples.

### **Lord, Faith, Baptism, God.**

From here, Paul moves on to a theme we've discussed a little bit already. He tells us that there is also **ONE LORD**. We learn who this Lord is from 1 Corinthians 8:6. It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, who is the Lord of the church. This would seem like a no-brainer, but it actually isn't. Recently, I've learned that at least one major denomination believes that there are two Lords: Jesus, who is Lord of heaven, and the head of that denomination, who is Lord on earth. To be honest, brethren, I've chewed on that one for a while, and I still can't make it work with Ephesians 4. If some group claims Jesus as one of two Lords, that says to me that Jesus isn't really their Lord at all.

However, the implications of saying that there is one Lord don't end there. Consider the question that Jesus Himself asks in Luke 6:46. This makes perfect sense. After all, if we acclaim Jesus as our Lord, that makes us His subjects, and subjects do what their Lord tells them to. If they don't, they're not subjects. They're rebels. In a religious sense, that means that it's our responsibility to obey the will of Jesus in everything. If His word tells us to do something, we need to do it. If His word tells us not to do something, we need not to do it. If His word doesn't mention something, it's not up to us to claim His Lordship for ourselves and decide to do it anyway. This isn't about talk. This is about action. Otherwise, on the day of judgment, Jesus is going to ask us why we called Him Lord but didn't do what He said.

This one Lord has instituted **ONE FAITH**. Jude outlines some of the characteristics of this one faith in Jude 3. As we consider this verse, there are two ideas we need to nail down in order to grasp its meaning. First, we need to figure out what Jude is talking about when he mentions "the faith". This isn't talking about faith in the sense of the belief in Jesus that every Christian has. It's talking about "the faith", that is to say, the system of teachings that our faith is based upon. We use the same word in the same way when we talk about "the Christian faith" or "the Jewish faith".

Jude says that this system of teachings was "once for all handed down to the saints". This is important, because it emphasizes the complete and final nature of God's revelation to us. When I, for instance, say that I'm going to fix the peeling paint in our bathroom once and for all, I mean that I have in mind a solution so comprehensive that I will never have to deal with peeling paint there ever again. Likewise, when Jude says that the faith was once for all handed down to us, he means that God revealed the faith so completely in the first century that no other revelation will ever be needed.

This is critically important for our spiritual understanding because of all the religious groups who say that revelation continues to this day. There are churches who say that their evolving traditions are just as binding as the word of God. There have been false prophets who have written new holy books, either as companions to or replacements for the Bible. There are even preachers who claim that the Holy Spirit reveals their sermons to them every Sunday morning. If Jude is telling the truth, then none of these churches or men can be. If the faith has been once for all delivered, there is no more revelation that remains to be delivered. Let's trust in the word of God alone and reject the teachings of men.

Just as there is one faith, there is also **ONE BAPTISM**. We see much about the nature of this one baptism revealed in the words of Ananias to the repentant Saul, as recorded in Acts 22:16. First of all, note that Ananias tells Saul to arise. In other words, this one baptism isn't just sitting there and being passively filled by the Holy Spirit. Instead, it is an active, physical activity. We learn what kind of physical activity it is when we see that it is described as a "washing". We wash with water, and the word "baptism" itself means "immersion", so baptism is immersion in water. In this washing, our sins are washed away, so baptism is an activity that causes our sins to be forgiven. Finally, when we are baptized, it is with an appeal to the authority of Jesus. It can only be shared in, then, by those who believe in Jesus and accept His Lordship. When we put this all together, we see that the one baptism of the Bible is the immersion of an adult believer in water for the forgiveness of His sins. Anything else, whether it be infant baptism, some imagined baptism of the Holy Spirit, or being baptized as the outward sign of an inward grace, is not a part of God's plan for mankind.

Finally, and perhaps as the crowning idea of all of these things, Paul tells us that there is **ONE GOD**. This is not an idea that began with Christianity. We see it articulated by Moses, all the way back in Deuteronomy 6:4. However, even though the covenant has changed, God hasn't. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same God we serve today. To Him and Him alone do we owe our obedience. Recently, this is an idea that has come under a great deal of attack by religious philosophers who insist, in the title of a book I read once, that "God has many names." That whether people worship Buddha or Siva or Coyote or Sango, they're just getting in touch with the same cosmic reality. Sadly for the folks who argue this, Jesus says in John 14 that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. We can't believe in many paths to God and still believe in the God of the Bible. Nor can we take anything else, whether it's our riches, our abilities, our families, or our health, and turn those into our god. Only if we put God first in our lives, only as we exalt Him over everything else, do we truly treat Him as God and serve Him.