

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE BASE OF OUR ONENESS

In exhorting us to safeguard the oneness (4:3), the Apostle Paul points out seven things as the base, the very foundation, of our oneness: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. These seven ones are of three groups. The first three can be grouped together, the Spirit with the Body as His expression and the Body related to the one hope. This Body, having been regenerated and being saturated with the Spirit as its essence, has the hope of being transfigured into the full likeness of Christ. The next three can also be grouped together, the Lord with faith and baptism, that we may be joined to Him. Then we have one God and Father, who is the Originator and source of all. The Spirit as the Executor of the Body, the Son as the Creator of the Body, and God the Father as the Originator of the Body - all three of the Triune God - are related to the Body. The third of the Trinity is mentioned first because the main concern here is the Body, and the Spirit is the essence of the Body. Then the course is traced back to the Son and then to the Father.

I. THE FIRST GROUP, RELATED TO THE SPIRIT

A. One Body

Verse 4 says, "One Body and one Spirit, as also you were called in one hope of your calling." The Body is mentioned before the Spirit because the oneness among us is related to the Body and is for the Body. The reason we need to keep the oneness is that we are all one Body.

B. One Spirit

There is a deep relationship between the one Spirit and the one hope. If we do not see this relationship, we shall not be able to know why Paul put the one Spirit and the one hope together with the one Body. The Spirit is the essence of the one Body. Without the Spirit, the Body is empty and has no life. The Body here is the Body of Christ, and the essence of the Body of Christ is the Spirit. Hence, the Body and the essence of the Body are one. It is impossible for the Body of Christ to have more than one essence. The unique essence of the Body is the Spirit.

The Spirit is in the Body. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (Gk.). This verse reveals that the one Spirit is not only the essence of the Body, but also the life and the life supply of the Body. Without the one Spirit, the Body would be a corpse.

C. One Hope

The hope in verse 4 is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). As saved ones, we have the hope that one day the Lord Jesus will come as our hope of glory and that through Him our vile body will be transfigured (Phil. 3:21). On one hand, we appreciate our bodies because they are useful and because without them we cannot exist in this world. On the other hand, our bodies are troublesome, for they are often weak and subject to illness. Therefore, we believers in Christ have the hope that one day our troublesome bodies will be metabolically transfigured by Christ to become glorified bodies.

If you find it difficult to believe that our vile bodies will be transfigured into glorious bodies, I ask you to consider the process a carnation seed undergoes to produce blossoms. In itself a carnation seed has no beauty. But by being sown into the soil and by growing normally, the seed is transfigured into a plant with beautiful blossoms. In speaking about the transfiguration of the body in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul compares our bodies to seeds (vv. 35-44). We have the solid hope that the day will come for the "seed" to blossom.

According to Romans 8, our hope also implies our manifestation as sons of God. We are sons of God today, but our sonship is hidden and even somewhat mysterious. For this reason, the worldly people treat us the same as everyone else, without any realization that we are sons of God. However, the time is coming when our sonship will be manifested. Then it will no longer be necessary to tell others that we are Christians. It will be apparent to all that we are sons of God in glory. The manifestation of the sons of God will also be the glorification of the sons of God. This is our hope.

Neither the transfiguration of our body nor our manifestation as the sons of God will merely be a sudden, unexpected occurrence. On the contrary, both our transfiguration and our manifestation are gradually taking place today. Yes, there is a sense in which transfiguration and manifestation will take place suddenly. But according to the truth of the New Testament and according to our experience, transfiguration and manifestation are also a gradual process in which we are involved today. This process is being carried out by the one Spirit, who is the

essence, the life, and the life supply of the Body of Christ. The Spirit is presently working within us to transfigure us and to manifest our sonship. This is the reason Paul linked the one hope and the one Spirit to the one Body.

As believers, we are members of the Body of Christ. Although you are a member of the Body, are you satisfied with the way you are? If we are honest, we shall admit that the present situation of both ourselves and the church is less than satisfactory. We need to be transfigured. Within us as members of the Body and within the Body as a whole there is the one Spirit, who is the essence of the Body and the life and life supply of the Body. This Spirit is neither dormant nor idle; on the contrary, He is working energetically within us toward the goal of bringing us into the fulfillment of the hope of our calling. This is why we say that the transfiguration of the body will not be accidental. Today the indwelling Spirit is carrying out both the transfiguration of the body and the manifestation of the sons of God. Because we are in the process of transfiguration and manifestation, the rapture should not come as a surprise. Rather, it should be a normal experience.

Verse 4 implies that the indwelling Spirit today is carrying out the process of bringing the Body of Christ into glory as the fulfillment of our hope. Therefore, in this verse we have the one Body, the one Spirit, and the one hope. Because we all are in the one Body with the one Spirit and have the one hope, we are one. There is no reason for us not to be one, and there is no cause to be different. We are one Body, and we have the one Spirit working within us to bring us to the goal of our hope.

II. THE SECOND GROUP, RELATED TO THE LORD

A. One Lord

Verse 5 says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." This verse does not speak of one Son, but of one Lord. In the Gospel of John, it is the Son in whom we believe (3:16), but in Acts, it is the Lord in whom we believe (Acts 16:31). In the writings of John, the Son is for life (1 John 5:12), whereas in Acts, the Lord, after His ascension, is for authority (Acts 2:36), a matter which concerns His headship. Here, as the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22), He is the Lord. Our believing in Christ is related to both life and authority. Not many Christians, however, realize that they must believe in the Lord for authority as well as for life. As lost sinners, we were not only spiritually dead, but we were also without the Lord, without a head. But after believing in the Lord, we have both life and a head.

In Ephesians, the oneness of the Body is related not only to life but also to headship. Christians are divided because they do not care for the Head. In verse 4 Paul covers life, which is closely related to the Spirit. But in verse 5 he deals with authority. Today few Christians care for life, and even fewer have any care for authority. By the Lord's mercy and grace, we in the Lord's recovery care both for life and for headship. We have not only the one Body with the one Spirit and the one hope, but also the one Lord with the one faith and the one baptism.

B. One Faith

In the New Testament faith denotes both the act of believing and the content of what we believe. Faith as our act of believing is personal and subjective. But faith as the content of what we believe is objective. The one faith in verse 5 is not our personal act of believing; it is the object of our faith.

As Christians, we may differ concerning various doctrines, but we all have the one faith. We all believe in the Person of the Lord Jesus and His redemptive work. We believe that Christ is the Son of God incarnated to be a man, that He died on the cross for our redemption, that He was resurrected on the third day, and that He has ascended into the heavens. This unique faith is held by all genuine Christians.

It is through this faith that we are joined to Christ. As soon as a person comes to believe in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he is made one with Christ. Before this he was outside of Christ, but now he is in Christ. This Christ is our Lord, our Head, and we are under His authority. We are members of His Body, and He is our Head.

If we would keep the oneness, we must take care of both life and authority. The life-giving Spirit is working within us so that we may be transformed in soul, transfigured in body, and fully manifested as sons of God. This is a matter of life. But we have not only the life-giving Spirit within us, but also the Lord as the Head of the Body. Hence, we must be submissive to the authority and headship of Christ.