

# The Church Series



BSB | Pure & Simple Bible

Lesson  
3 of 7

*\*\*The second of three big questions considers how the church functions. In this section we will consider the how sinners are saved and added to the church, how the church family gets along, what happens when the church assembles, and what happens behind the scenes.*

## Part 1: The Unity of the Faith

### *A Unity Plea*

The New Testament is the foundation of our understanding about God's will for the church. It was not written for us to interpret or practice however we want.<sup>1</sup> We are shepherded to unity through a common obedience of God's word. Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers:

*I do not pray for these alone [the apostles], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one**, [...]<sup>2</sup>*

In this same prayer, Jesus clarified that the Bible was the guide to unity. He prayed: *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*<sup>3</sup> The apostles continued Jesus' plea for unity:

*[...] fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*<sup>4</sup>

If Jesus and the apostles pray for our unity, shouldn't we listen?

### *The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*

The apostle Paul cared deeply for the churches of Christ that he established and trained. He often wrote letters to encourage and teach the Christians abroad. One time, he wrote a very special epistle to Christians in Ephesus. In it, he said:

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*<sup>5</sup>

The Ephesian church embodied the potential of the gospel. There were converted Jews and Gentiles gathered together in this local body of Christ. Their various customs, experiences, and ethnicities were unified by a common salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul challenged these Christians to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. They were instructed to cherish, guard, and make this unity effective. How was this church to do so, and how can Christ's church keep such a unity today?

### *Seven Basic Factors of Unity*

Paul continued in his letter to the Ephesian Christians with seven basic factor to the unity of the church. These seven factors are the foundation of Christian unity for the church around the world. This does not mean that every single issue is addressed in this passage.

**Section 2: How Does the Church Operate?**

- ✓ The Unity of the Faith
- How the Lord Adds to the Church
- The "One Another" Factor
- When the Church Gathers for Worship
- The Harvest is Plentiful!
- Skilled Hands in Jesus' Hospital

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:20-21 (See also Galatians 1:6-8 & Revelation 22:18-19a)

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:1-2

<sup>3</sup> John 17:20 (Emphasis added)

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3

<sup>5</sup> John 17:17

Christians must seek God's will for unity by reading and understanding the *entire* New Testament. However, as a beginning point, these seven factors of unity are offered. This Scripture serves as a benchmark for people who are new to the faith or learning about the church of the Bible for the first time. It helps establish an objective standard for Christian unity. Paul wrote:

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were 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.*<sup>6</sup>

**There is one body.** This is the church itself. Paul's first element of Christian unity is a continuation of a metaphor he used frequently.<sup>7</sup> Paul taught that the church was like a body. Jesus was the head and the church is the parts (members) of the body. The church of Christ provides unity to the world by being the saving body for all who obey the gospel. Regardless of culture or language, the church unites all believers together in service to God.

**There is one Spirit.** This is the Holy Spirit, who serves as the source of inspiration and revelation for the church.<sup>8</sup> Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth.<sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit provides unity to the church through the inspired word (the Bible). His guidance allowed the New Testament scribes to write with Divine understanding.<sup>10</sup>

**There is one hope.** This is Heaven, the eternal reward for the righteous. Heaven serves as the motivation for the church, as Christians desire to be with God in His eternal kingdom.<sup>11</sup> Hope provides unity to the church through a common reward. There will be no rivalry for greater rewards that would cause animosity between Christians.

**There is one Lord.** This is Jesus, the Savior and Redeemer. He serves as the Head of the church.<sup>12</sup> Jesus provides unity to the church as the sacrifice by which people are saved and by uniting us all under His authority.<sup>13</sup>

**There is one faith.** This is *the way* or the system of belief and practice that the church maintains.<sup>14</sup> It is an expression of the Christian perspective, worldview, and lifestyle. The faith provides unity to the church through offering a common set of beliefs and practices that all Christians use to navigate their lives.

**There is one baptism.** This is salvation and entrance into the church. Baptism is an immersion in water for the remission of sins.<sup>15</sup> The Bible teaches baptism as an essential part of the Christian faith throughout the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> Baptism provides unity for the church by giving the common method by which any penitent sinner is saved from sin. By God's grace through faith, we are saved when we obey the gospel which culminates with immersion in water.

**There is one God.** This is God the Father. He is described further as being above all (omnipotence), through all (omnipresence) and in all (omniscience).<sup>17</sup> This does not deny Jesus or the Holy Spirit a part of the divine Godhead. Their role as God is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Paul is simply concluding this foundation of unity with a reminder that we serve but one God, unlike many of the polytheistic religions of his days. God, the Father of all, provides unity to the church by reminding Jews and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor, that no matter who we are, we were all created by God.

Factor	Unity Element
One body	The Church
One Spirit	<u>The Holy Spirit:</u> The inspiration and revelation of the church
One hope	<u>Heaven:</u> The motivation of the church
One Lord	<u>Jesus Christ</u> The Head of the church
One faith	<u>The Way:</u> The common beliefs and practices of the church
One Baptism	<u>Immersion in water:</u> Salvation & Entrance into the church
One God	God the Father

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:4-6

<sup>7</sup> Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:22-23

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:6-11

<sup>9</sup> John 16:7-13

<sup>10</sup> 2 Peter 1:20-21

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 2:12, Titus 2:13, Revelation 21:22

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:19, Hebrews 1:1-4

## Unity Spoiled

The unity of the faith is achieved when the church submits to the will of God together. When people attempt to achieve unity without submitting to God's Word, unity cannot be achieved. If someone says, "It doesn't matter what we do as long as we love God and believe in Jesus," they spoil the unity of the faith. The Bible says:

*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.*<sup>19</sup>

Some try to twist the Scriptures to fit their own opinions or creeds. Others scoff at the idea of an objective standard that everyone must submit to. Others attempt to discredit God's Word as the source of unity for the Christian Age. Through the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter wrote of those who attempted to twist the Scripture:

*[...] and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*<sup>20</sup>

## Why does Unity Matter?

Paul continued to teach the Christians in Ephesus about the importance of unity. Having established a foundation of unity, he explains the reason that unity matters. The unity of the faith brings us to the complete knowledge of Jesus Christ and guards us from the ignorance and subjectivity. Paul told the Ephesians:

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*<sup>21</sup>

Paul used the metaphor of a boat being tossed around the stormy sea. It is out of control and unable to find safety. So is a religion that disregards the unity of the faith. Such a religion is tossed about *with every wind of doctrine*. Religious ignorance and subjective beliefs cannot excuse people from God's judgment. They are cheap imitations of God's standard and do nothing but sear the conscience from repenting. Unity matters because this objective standard gives every person around the world the same opportunity to understand and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. The unity of the faith binds Christians together against the ignorance and subjective beliefs of a lost world. Through a common understanding and submission to God's Word, the church of Christ offers confidence to anyone who seeks the Lord.

*Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* (Matthew 16:18).

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.* (Acts 20:28)

<sup>14</sup> Philippians 1:27, Jude 1:3

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:38, 22:16, Romans 6:1-3, 1 Peter 3:21

<sup>16</sup> See the next study and also *Christian Basics: How to Become a Christian*

<sup>17</sup> See *Christian Basics: God*

<sup>18</sup> See *Christian Basics: The Godhead*

<sup>19</sup> 2 John 9

<sup>20</sup> 2 Peter 3:15-16

<sup>21</sup> Ephesians 4:11-14

## Part 2: How the Lord Adds to the Church

### Section 2: How Does the Church Operate?

- ✓ The Unity of the Faith
- How the Lord Adds to the Church
- The "One Another" Factor
- When the Church Gathers for Worship
- The Harvest is Plentiful!
- Skilled Hands in Jesus' Hospital



### *Added? But How?*

After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, three thousand people repented and were baptized!<sup>1</sup> The Christian Age had begun and the church was established. The Bible says these new Christians:

*[...] ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

The church is pivotal to our salvation. It is the saving body of united Christians who enjoy fellowship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Whenever someone becomes a Christian, their membership in the church is automatic. Those who seek a personal relationship with Jesus outside of the church will not find it. The Bible teaches that to be saved and to be added to the church are synonymous. How does the Lord add to the church?

### *Added Through Jesus' Sacrifice*

People are not added to the church like they might join a man-made organization. There is no application or monetary fee. As stated previously, when a person is saved by the blood of Christ, he or she is immediately added by God to the church. We are added to the church through Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*<sup>2</sup> He explained that only through Him is salvation possible.

The exclusive nature of salvation through Jesus was preached by the apostles as well. Peter would say, *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*<sup>3</sup> The theme of the Bible is God's unfailing love for undeserving man by sending His only Son to be a sacrifice to offer eternal salvation. While people may find happiness or contentment in a prophet, an idol, or any other man-made way, salvation from sin and spiritual death comes only through Jesus Christ.

### *Added by Grace through Faith*

Salvation from sin and spiritual death is Divine in origin. Mankind has tried to save themselves in many ways, but sin is too great and mankind is too weak. For this reason, salvation starts with God. Please consider these terms:

When God plans  
and God works

**Grace**

*an unmerited/undeserved favor*

When God plans  
and man works

**Faith**

*a demonstration of complete trust*

When man plans  
and man works

**Merit**

*a reward or wage that one deserves*

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:41

<sup>2</sup> John 14:6

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:12

The Bible says that sinners are saved by grace through faith.<sup>4</sup> Grace is a word that means *an unmerited or undeserved favor*. Salvation is undeserved because God did not have to send Jesus. What sinners deserve is justice and judgment for disobedience. In His love, the Father sent His innocent Son to die in our guilty place. Instead of getting what we deserved, mankind can get exactly what we do not deserve: forgiveness and salvation. This unmerited and undeserved favor is God's grace.

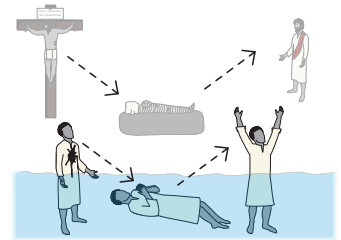
God does not save us nor add us to the church by our own works of merit.<sup>5</sup> If one tries to *earn* salvation through their own works of merit, they imply that salvation is something they *deserve* and not God's precious gift. No one is able to come to the Father by their own merit. Everyone who seeks forgiveness must accept they need Jesus' sacrifice to cover their sins.

The Bible teaches that we access God's grace through faith. We have faith in God by obeying what He has commanded (also called "obeying the gospel"). God's grace does not extend to those who do not know Him or do not obey the gospel.<sup>6</sup> His grace is offered freely to anyone who is willing to both know Him and do as God commands.

## *Added through Baptism*

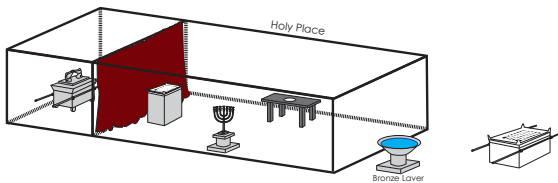
The Bible teaches that faith comes by *hearing* the gospel.<sup>7</sup> Faith *believes*<sup>8</sup> that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. Faith is shown in *repentance*<sup>9</sup> of sins. Repentance is a lifestyle change from serving sin to serving God. Faith is stated by *confessing*<sup>10</sup> that Jesus is the Son of God. These words are confessed when one is ready to be saved, but it doesn't end there. The new lifestyle of godliness becomes a confession of Christ. Faith is demonstrated when a penitent sinner is *baptized* in water for the remission of sins.<sup>11</sup>

Baptism is symbolic of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. He submitted to a physical action (death on a cross) to accomplish a spiritual action (redemption of sin for mankind). Likewise, a penitent sinner symbolically dies to sin, is buried with Christ, and is resurrected as a new, saved person!<sup>12</sup> The penitent sinner submits to a physical action (going under water) to accomplish a spiritual action (remission of sins.) When a penitent sinner is baptized, there is nothing magical in the water that physically cleans them. The water is not holy. The act of faith that obeys God is what saves. The Bible says:



*Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*<sup>13</sup>

Baptism is further symbolic of entering God's holy place. In the Old Testament, the priests had to wash in the bronze laver before they could enter the holy place.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, a penitent sinner cannot enter the church until they have been baptized for the remission of sins. The New Testament teaches that baptism is a *spiritual* washing:



*Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10; See *Christian Basics: How to Become a Christian*

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:6,8; See *Christian Basics: All About Works*

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:17

<sup>8</sup> Mark 16:16

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 7:10

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 10:32-33; Acts 8:36-38; Romans 10:9-10

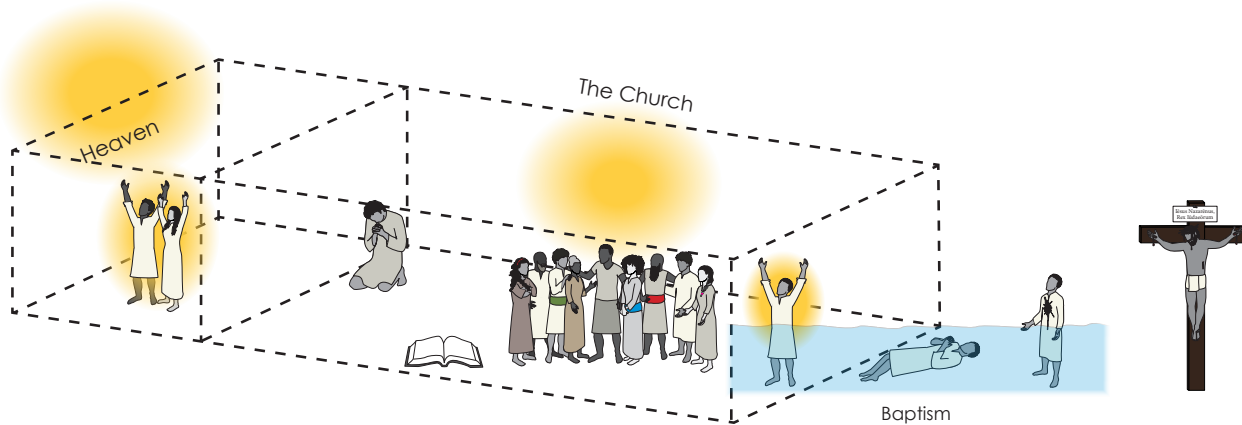
<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:38, 22:16, Galatians 3:27-28;

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6:3-6

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 3:20-21 (NASB); See *Christian Basics: All About Baptism*

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 30:17-21

<sup>15</sup> Acts 22:16

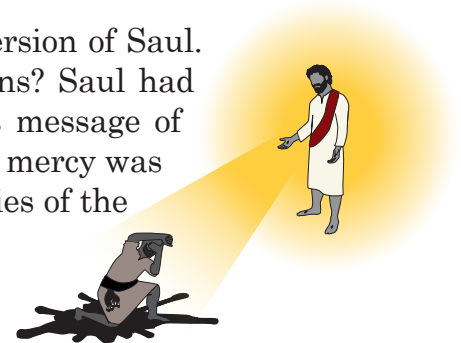


*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>*

## *Anyone Can Be Added to the Church*

The gospel of Jesus is good news for a good reason: anyone can all be saved! Christianity is not for people of a certain skin color, language, culture, wealth, or education.<sup>19</sup> God wants everyone to be added to the church!<sup>20</sup> Every person was created in God's image and every person is special, unique, and loved by God.

Some may still feel unworthy of God's love. Consider the conversion of Saul. How could such a terrible man be offered redemption from his sins? Saul had persecuted Christians *unto death* and actively tried to stop God's message of salvation from reaching the lost!<sup>21</sup> The reason that God offered Saul mercy was to demonstrate that God wants all men to be saved, even the enemies of the church. Saul became known as *Paul*. Through the Holy Spirit, Paul explained God's grace in his own life like this:



*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.<sup>22</sup>*

Paul considered himself the worst of sinners because he had opposed God and approved in the arrest and murder of Christians. He reflected that if God could forgive the worst of sinners, God can forgive anyone! When a person decides to obey the gospel, God adds them to the church. The new Christian can read with confidence that God added them to the church that Jesus built!

*Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18).*

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)*

<sup>16</sup> Titus 3:4-5 (see also Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 10:22) <sup>20</sup> 2 Peter 3:8-9

<sup>17</sup> Luke 17:7-10

<sup>21</sup> Acts 22:4

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>22</sup> 1 Timothy 1:15-16 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> Galatians 3:27-28