



Truth

On Tough Texts

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A MINISTRY OF GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

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The Ground of Unity (2)

Ephesians 4:4–6

CONTINUING OUR STUDY OF THE GROUND OF UNITY IN Ephesians 4:4–6, in our last issue we examined the first three “spiritual realities” that join all true believers: **one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.** We continue this month with two more.

IV. One Lord (v. 5a)

The Meaning

Without question, this is the most pointed and the most important of all seven of these spiritual realities. It appears in the middle of Paul’s list and does seem to be the very heart of our unity. There truly is only **one Lord**—*the Lord Jesus Christ who is Savior, Master, and God incarnate.*

How vividly this is demonstrated in Mark 12:28-34! A certain scribe came to Jesus and asked, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus answered: “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

The scribe responded with his own profound statement: “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Seeing the scribe’s understanding, our Lord then said, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” While the man

was not yet in the kingdom, he was close. Notice that he repeated everything Christ said *except one Lord*. He understood the importance of loving God; all that was left was to recognize Jesus Himself as **Lord** and believe and obey Him. As we’ll see in our application later, it’s amazing that the principle of lordship in salvation is a big issue. Here is a vivid example of its centrality.

After being arrested, Peter proclaimed to the Jewish rulers that the same Jesus that they had crucified was in reality the “corner stone” that they had rejected (as noted back in Eph. 2:20). He then declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:1-12). The world says there are many lords, but God says there is only **one Lord**.

This serves to remind us of an often-overlooked truth, that our salvation lies not in *our experience* but in *Christ’s energy*. In other words, there’s a tendency to judge someone’s salvation because their experience was different than yours or mine. John Macneil, an early 20th Century Scottish preacher, wonderfully illustrated this in a sermon. He imagined a conversation between the two blind men our Lord healed: the one in John 9 and the other in Mark 8. As we recall, the one in John 9 was healed when Jesus took some clay, spat on it, placed it on the man’s eyes, and then told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. In the case of the man in Mark 8, however, Jesus did none of this. Macneil imagined these two meeting one day and comparing their conversion experience. The man in John 9 asked the man in Mark 8, “What did you feel like when He put that mixture of clay and spittle on your eyes?” “Clay and spittle?” answered the man in Mark 8, “I don’t know anything about clay and spittle.” “What,” said the man in John 9, “don’t you remember how He spit on the

ground and made the mixture and put it on your eyes? I am asking, What did you feel?" But the man in Mark 8 just answered, "There was nothing put on my eyes." The conversation continued until finally the man in John 9 said, "Look here, I do not believe you've been healed at all; you must still be blind. If He did not put the clay on your eyes, you are still blind." Macneil concluded, "In other words, two religious denominations came into being at once: the Mud-ites and the Anti-mudites."¹

That is precisely what happens when we are looking at our own experiences instead of the **one Lord** who saved us. Some people had a dramatic conversion out of the depths of wickedness; others were saved when they were young and untouched by heinous sin. I've heard former gangsters and gang members give their testimony, almost to the point of glorifying sin, and thereby giving the impression that their conversion was "better" than someone else's. Others tend to think that being saved as a result of a particular preacher's ministry is in some way special.

But none of these things matter. It's interesting, in fact, that the Bible nowhere says that we have to cite that "moment in time" when we were saved. Of course, many people can do this, but that doesn't mean they have to. Neither is it required that we remember the name of the preacher we were listening to, or the verse he preached, or an illustration that he used. What matters is the **one Lord** who saved us.

The key to understanding this doctrinal reality is, of course, the term **one lord**. We dealt with the question of the Deity of Christ back in Issue 16 (November 2006), "Is the Bible Unclear About the Deity of Christ?" so we will not repeat that material here. We would reemphasize, however, that the Deity of Christ is an absolute cardinal doctrine of Christianity, the central truth of the Gospel. Anyone who rejects that truth, in fact, is not a believer and cannot be saved, as our Lord Himself made clear: "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24).

The Application

The application here is obvious: *unity can only exist with a proper view of Christ*. Christianity is Christ, so how we view Him is absolutely essential. As noted in TOTT Issue 16, when used of Jesus in a confessional way, **Lord** clearly refers to His divinity. To argue that point is utter folly and blatant apostasy.

Countless cults and false religions, for example, deny the Deity of Christ. To the Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus was not equal to Jehovah and was not God in human flesh but was rather a created being and was actually Michael the Archangel in his preexistent state, having a brother named Lucifer who rebelled against God.² Likewise, to the Mormon, Jesus—like all men, in fact—was a preexistent spirit who took his body at birth in this world; He is set apart from the rest of us only by the fact that He was "the Firstborn" of God's spirit-children.³ Other cults, such as Christian Science, the Unity School of Christianity, The Way International, and others illustrate why they are all called "a cult," namely, because they deny the deity of Christ or in some way pervert that doctrine.

But all this is nothing new in Church history, rather simply a revival of the ancient heresy called Arianism. Arius, a 4th Century parish priest in Alexandria, taught that Jesus was not coequal with God and was, in fact, a created being.

A popular book called *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (Doubleday, 2003) is another graphic illustration. While seemingly just another thriller novel set in present-day, it has a hidden agenda that makes it far more. Starting with the murdered curator of a Paris museum, the hero and heroine of the story must decipher the clues left behind by the murdered man and thereby uncover an ancient and sinister plot. *And what is that ancient secret?* The supposed "true" story that Christianity has been trying to hide for 1,600 years, namely, that Jesus was just another man who actually ended up marrying Mary Magdalene.

Not only is that book Arianism and Gnosticism in a new wrapper, but it's also full of countless historical errors that reveal the author to be either incredibly ignorant or just a blatant liar. For example, referring to the Council of Nicea in 325, Brown claims that "until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless." *But that simply is not so*. History proves beyond the slightest doubt that early Christians overwhelmingly worshipped Jesus Christ as their risen Savior and Lord. Before the appearance of complete doctrinal statements, early Christian leaders wrote summaries of doctrine called the "Rule" or "Canon" of Faith that stated this fact. The canon of well-known second-century bishop Irenaeus, for example, was prompted by I Corinthians 8:6: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." There is no doubt whatsoever that those early Christians viewed our Lord as God.

This serves to illustrate a consistent practice of unbelievers, namely, *they must distort history to deny truth*. Why? Because history, as the old expression goes, is "His Story." It is what God is doing in the world, what He is accomplishing. So to escape the plain truths of God's Word, men must revise the facts, reinterpret events, and rewrite the history books. Another example in our day is the rewriting of American history. To escape the fact of America being founded on biblical and moral principles, revisionist historians totally ignore the godliness of many of our Founding Fathers.

As mentioned earlier, the "lordship salvation" debate again comes into view here. There is something seriously wrong with a theology that teaches that there is a difference between "accepting Jesus" as *Savior* and then at some later day accepting Him as **Lord** when there is absolutely no such dichotomy or distinction in Scripture and is, in point of fact, *an invention of modern (not historical) Christianity*. It is clearly a denial of **one Lord** to say that all one must do is "believe in Jesus" to be saved. After all, "the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas. 2:19). They believe in the facts concerning Christ, and that is exactly what many today view salvation to be, just some vague belief, where no repentance is necessary, no change of life is expected, and no responsibility is demanded. As mentioned earlier, Romans 10:9-10 makes it clear that salvation is based not only on the recognition of Christ as

Savior but a confession of Him as *Lord*. How could it be plainer than this? “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

What **one Lord**, and therefore so-called “Lordship Salvation” means, is that true salvation results in an *automatic change* in the person who believes. True “conversion” (Latin *convertere*, “to turn around, transform”) fundamentally speaks of a “new lordship.” No longer are *we* Lord, no longer is *Satan* Lord, but *Christ* is **Lord**. This is the very essence of salvation, as Paul wrote to the carnal Corinthians, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17).

So we say again, *unity can only exist with a proper view of Christ and His salvation*. Tolerating false doctrine and trying to create unity where none can possibly exist is an abomination. But when this principle is met, what sweet fellowship and unity it brings. As commentator Albert Barnes writes:

There is no better way of promoting unity among Christians than by reminding them that they have the same Saviour. And when jealousies and heart-burnings arise; or when they are disposed to contend about trifles; when they magnify unimportant matters until they are in danger of rending the church asunder, let them feel that they have one Lord and Saviour, and they will lay aside their contentions, and be one again. Let two men, who have never seen each other before, meet in a distant land, and feel that they have the same Redeemer, and their hearts will mingle into one. They are not aliens, but friends. A cord of sympathy is struck more tender than that which binds them to country or home; and though of different nations, complexions, or habits, they will feel that they are one. Why should contentions ever arise between those who have the same Redeemer?

Paul’s point about **one Lord** leads right to another spiritual reality.

V. One Faith (v. 5b)

The Meaning

There has been some debate as to whether **one faith** refers to the *act of believing* or the doctrines that one believes, that is, *a system of truth*. But as Paul notes several times in Ephesians (1:1–2, 15–17; 2:8), what matters most is the *object* of faith. One commentator and theologian astutely makes this point when he writes:

Many commentators understand *faith* as the subjective act of believing. But such acts are one only as they have the same object. Jews, Moslems, Hindus all believe; but they do not have the same faith. The faith here mentioned must be the doctrines believed. [French historian and agnostic Joseph] Renan believed that Jesus was just a moral teacher; [German philosopher and liberal theologian

Albert] Schweitzer believed that Jesus was insane; [German existential theologian Rudolf] Bultman believed that we could not believe anything that Jesus is reported to have said or done. It is not the psychology of the act, but the doctrines believed that constitute the unity of the many Christians’ many acts of believing.⁴

It seems obvious, then, that Paul is saying that *true unity is based on common doctrine*, that is, the system of truth that we all have in common. Why introduce something totally *subjective* into a list of *objective* truths? Paul’s emphasis in this list is to present absolutes, not what we might feel, think, or even believe about it, but specific, unchanging realities. He wants to prove what is the basis for unity, so the last thing he would do is interject something subjective. Mark it down: *subjectivity never proves anything*. The evolutionist believes that the entire universe came from one Big Bang billions of years ago. Does that make it so? No, for it’s not our belief that makes anything true. It’s what God says that makes something true.

This is exactly the point Jude makes in his short but powerful letter, that believers “should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). **One faith**, then, refers to “the body of revealed truth that constitutes Historical, Evangelical Christianity.” This doesn’t mean an entire system of theology on which we all can agree; that would be impossible. Rather it refers again to the unique revelation of God through Christ. Paul has, of course, dealt with this often here in Ephesians. Specifically, this body of truth is the very essence of the Gospel, *the redemption by blood and salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone*. This one faith is clearly stated in Romans 1:16–17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

This was the **one faith** that was virtually lost for centuries and restored to prominence in the Protestant Reformation. This is the **one faith** for which John Huss and countless others died. This is the *sola fide* (faith alone) that Martin Luther stood for, against that dark, sinister power of Rome.

Also implicit in **one faith** is where this body of revealed truth is located, namely, *the Scriptures*. In other words, it is obviously the completed Scriptures that contain the record of “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” In fact, a basic acknowledgment of Scripture as the Word of God is automatic in salvation. Why? Because the person is saying, “I believe what the Bible says about sin, salvation, and the Savior.” Here is an acknowledgment of Scripture being true in its revelation of Christ. As Paul also declared to Timothy, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2). Those early Christians had a body of basic doctrine (the Apostles’ doctrine; cf. Acts 2:42) that they believed and committed to others.

So important is right doctrine, that Paul spoke of those who “resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (II Tim. 3:8) and instructed Titus to “rebuke

[false teachers] sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13). We do not tolerate false doctrine or embrace false teachers. On the contrary, we rebuke them because they have violated “the faith.” Among Paul’s last words, in fact, was that confidence that, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (II Tim. 4:7). Oh, that that would be our testimony as well!

The Application

The application here is two-fold.

First, unity can only exist with a proper view of salvation. The hallmark of all cults and false religions is works, that a person attains salvation either in whole or at least in part by his own efforts.

To the Jehovah’s Witness, for example, as its founder Charles Russell wrote, “they must be recovered from blindness as well as from death, that they, each for himself, may have a full chance to prove, by obedience or disobedience, their worthiness of eternal life.”⁵ Likewise, according to Article 3 of the *Mormon Articles of Faith*, “All mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.” According to Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God, “Salvation, then is a process! But how the God of this world would blind your eyes to that!!! He tries to deceive you into thinking all there is to it is just ‘accepting Christ’ with ‘no works’—and presto-change, you are pronounced ‘saved.’ But the Bible reveals that none is yet ‘saved.’”⁶ And on it goes from religion to religion. Of course, the question arises, “But how many works are needed?” As Shakespeare put it, “Ay, there’s the rub,” that is, there’s the big *obstacle* to their system, because they don’t know how many works it takes!⁷

Two world religions, however, stand out as leading more people into error than all others. One is Islam, which in our day is more in the spotlight than ever before and is enjoying unprecedented tolerance. But it, too, is just another religion of works. It is a legalistic system where a person must earn his salvation by holding to its five main doctrines, called the “Five Articles of Faith” (God, Angels, Scripture, Prophets, and Last Days), and especially following its “Five Pillars of Faith” (The Creed, Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, and the Pilgrimage to Mecca). This, of course, flatly denies Jesus’ own words, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). You might call your god “Allah” or anything else you wish, but the issue is the Lord Jesus Christ—one Lord and **one faith**. It’s not your works, not what you might do, not how many “infidels” you might blow up, but in Jesus Christ alone.

But the most shocking tolerance of all among evangelicals is that of Roman Catholicism. *Many persist in ignoring that it, too, is just another works system.* As is made clear in its own *Baltimore Catechism*, Catholicism teaches “that among the chief means provided by Christ for our sanctification are the sacraments. They are outward signs instituted by Christ to give grace. . . . When the sign is applied to the one who receives the sacrament, it signifies inward grace and has the power of producing it in the soul.”

Particularly troubling is Catholicism’s teachings concerning Mary. She is considered to be the “Co-Redemptrix” with Christ, that is, she cooperates with Christ in the work of saving sinners. While the Vatican II council (1963-65) brought certain reforms, it changed nothing of Catholicism’s underlying theology. In that council it was stated that Mary was “used by God not merely in a passive way, but as cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. . . . She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ. She presented Him to the Father in the temple, and was united with Him in suffering as He died on the cross.”⁸ In other words, while the Church does not teach that Mary literally died for our sins, it does teach that by giving birth to Christ and nurturing Him through life, she indirectly contributed to the work of salvation.

Further still, Mary is also considered “Mediatrice,” that is, she now dispenses God’s grace and blessings to the spiritually needy. Again, Vatican II reaffirmed:

This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross. This maternity will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. For, taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation.

By her maternal charity, Mary cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to their happy fatherland. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix.⁹

How is it possible that any Evangelical cannot recognize that that is an abominable perversion of the Gospel? It has nothing to do with the Gospel, for it is neither **one faith** nor “one Lord.” It is “another gospel,” as Paul said, which is actually not another gospel (good news) at all. He goes on to make it clear that any Gospel other than what he delivered (salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone) is to be “accursed” (Gal. 1:6–9). Salvation is apart from any outward works that we can do (Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5; etc.).

Second, because the Lord Jesus Christ is inseparably linked to His Word (Jn. 1:14), there is another application here that is equally obvious: *unity can only exist with a proper view of Scripture.* Another hallmark of cults is their rejection of the Scriptures as the sole, absolute, and sufficient authority. Mormonism, for example, says, “We believe the Bible to be the Word of God in so far as it is translated correctly.”¹⁰ But it also teaches that a correct translation is *impossible* because the Roman Catholic Church has subtracted from it. Orson Pratt, an early Mormon Church “apostle,” wrote, “Who knows that even one verse of the Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original.”¹¹ The real authority in Mormonism, therefore, resides in three “sacred books”: *The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants,* and *The Pearl of Great Price.* Additionally, contemporary

living prophets also contribute to authoritative pronouncements of the Mormon Church.

Likewise, while the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, claimed she got her teachings from the Bible, she also claimed in no uncertain terms that her revelations were higher than the Bible. Similarly, the writings of Ellen G. White are considered by Seventh Day Adventists to be inspired revelations. Some charismatics also claim to receive new revelations in visions and dreams. And again, while many today insist on unity between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, that is patently impossible. While Catholicism does teach that the Bible is *inspired*, it denies that it is *sufficient*. That was, in fact, the very battleground of the Reformation. Added to the Bible are the teachings and traditions of the church. It is, in fact, quite open in this view. Its *Catechism of the Catholic Church* boldly states that the Church “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.” Further, added to that is the infallibility of the Pope when he makes “absolutely authoritative” pronouncements *ex cathedra* (from the chair).

Please mark this down: *the common thread through all false teaching is adherence to a second authority that supercedes the Bible when the Bible says something that men don't like*. Even evangelicals, though they say the Bible is their authority, actually replace Scripture with their own ideas and opinions. The modern “ministries” of Pragmatism, Relativism, seeker-sensitivity, user-friendliness, seeking the unchurched, and so on are man's philosophy not God's revelation. This issue is imbedded deep in my soul, because compromise of the truth is commonplace, because what God says in Scripture is replaced by what men think based on their own experience.

The Bible in no uncertain terms speaks of itself being the sole and sufficient authority of God. A key verse here is II Peter 1:19: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” In verses 15–18 Peter writes about his witnessing Christ's transfiguration, but now he declares that there is something much surer than “personal experience.” How important this is in light of how many people today speak of their “experience,” that they saw Jesus at the foot of their bed, or they saw a statue of Mary weeping or Jesus bleeding. Peter declares here that he, too, had an experience but that it cannot compare with the “more sure word of prophecy,” that is, *the written Word of God*. In essence Peter says, “Yes, my experience was exciting, but what makes it true is not that I saw it but that it coincides with the written Truth of God's Word.”

The word “sure” is the Greek *bebaios*, which means “fit to tread on, having a firm foundation, durable, unshakeable,

sure, reliable, and certain.” Further, used in a legal sense, it meant “valid and legal.” As one Greek authority writes, “Thus the hope and confidence of man is firmly secured as by an anchor, when the object of the trust is the Word of God, which He has legally confirmed with an oath (Heb. 6:16, 19).”¹² As another points out, this word “in the New Testament is not used of persons but objects (Heb. 6:19), that which does not fail or waver, immovable, and on which one may rely.”¹³ So, and please get this, *as long as we cling to the Word, we will be firm, unshakable, sure, and certain*. The reason for this “surer proof” is because the Word of God came by inspiration, as Peter goes on to write in verse 20–21: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved [literally, carried along] by the Holy Ghost.”

So, the two-fold application of **one faith** is very clear: *unity can exist only with a proper view of salvation and Scripture*. The doctrine of salvation today has been reconsidered, redefined, and even rejected. Likewise, the Word of God has been mocked, maligned, and mutilated. But one of the very foundation stones of unity is that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from any merit or works and the acceptance of the Bible as the only inspired, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient revelation to man. Opinions vary, experiences change, methods will adjust, but *God's Word lasts forever*.

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NOTES

¹ Cited in Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity*, pp. 87-88.

² Jehovah's Witness publication, *The Kingdom is at Hand*, p. 49.

³ Mormon publication, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 93:21–23.

⁴ Gordon Clark, *Ephesians*, p. 131.

⁵ *Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, p. 158.

⁶ *Why Were You Born?*, p. 11.

⁷ *Hamlet*, III.1.73. “Rub” means “obstacle.” It was a “technical term from the game of bowls, where a ‘rub’ is any obstruction that hinders or deflects the course of the bowl” (*Hamlet*, The New Folger Library Shakespeare (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), p. 126.

⁸ Walter M. Abbott, S.J., General Editor, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), pp. 88, 91.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

¹⁰ *Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Article 8.

¹¹ *Orson Pratt's Works*, 1891, p. 218.

¹² Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. I, p. 658.

¹³ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, p. 331.

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This monthly publication is intended to address Scriptures that have historically been debated, are particularly difficult to understand, or have generated questions among Believers. We hope it will be an encouragement and challenge to God's people to carefully examine and discern Truth. Periodically, we will also include book reviews of popular books, for much that is published today demands discerning reading. While the positions presented here are based on years of careful Biblical research, we recognize that other respected men of God differ.

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