

341  
"THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY"

Eph. 4:1-7, 11-16.

INTRODUCTION:

A prominent European princess recently joined a certain large Christian church explaining that her reason for doing so was that she felt it afforded the best opportunity of promoting Christian unity.

No one church or group has a monopoly on trying to promote Christian unity.

Many churches and denominations and groups have been doing this in various ways,

and some quite successfully.

Now, some that have for so long resisted these efforts are belatedly trying to jump on the bandwagon with a great deal of publicity & fanfare.

The real question, however, is the basis of Christian unity.

This determines the kind of unity we shall have.

All Christians agree that unity is the ideal.

This is Christ's prayer in John 17.

This is the theme of this section of the Eph. letter, as in the first part of the letter the theme was

ONE MESSAGE -- REDEMPTION,

and from 2:11-3:21 it was

ONE MISSION -- THE PROPAGATION OF REDEMPTION,

so in this section, 4:1-16, it is

ONE BODY -- THE CHURCH.

Certainly God's ideal is not churches that disown each other and refuse the fellowship of unity and love in common relation to One Head. God does not intend that His people shall be permanently divided and separated by sectarian limitations.

This ideal can hardly be realized, however, as long as we think of the church as a human organization rather than a new creation.

Divisions will continue as long as we put human dogmas above the Word and the Spirit.

Unity is only a dim hope if we persist in the heirarchy of a human head instead of recognizing the Lordship of Christ alone as the sole Head of His church.



## I. THE CHURCH, THE BODY OF CHRIST, IN EPHESIANS.

A. 1:17, 22, 23, "God has made Him (Christ) the head over all things for the church, which is His body, the FULLNESS of Him who fills all in all."

1. Christ is the fullness of God, 1:23
2. The church is the fullness of Christ, 4:13

B. 5:23, He makes an appeal for the submission of the wife to the husband "for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the Church, his body."

C. 2:11-22, the breaking down of "the dividing wall of hostility" and the reconciling of both Jew and Gentile unto God "in one body through the cross."

1. This had been brought about because the "blood of Christ" has been offered as the point of reconciliation (vs. 13-15)
2. The terms "one new man" (vs 15) and the "one body" are terms for the church.
3. The church is a community of the reconciled, a fellowship of those who have entered into a new relationship to God, and thereby into a new relationship to their fellow man, through Christ.
4. For this reason, strife, estrangement, factions, and divisions are the most devastating sins imaginable in the church, for they strike at the very root and nature of the church.  
They, like all efforts to change the nature of the true church or the substance of its faith, are under the most severe judgment of God.

## II. THE ARGUMENT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IS THE SEVEN BASIC UNITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

### A. One Body

1. We have already noticed the teaching in this letter that the church is the one Body of Christ.
  - a. Reconciled to God through the cross, 2:16
  - b. This refers to the church as an institution, but the same unity & spirit should be found in each local body of believers.

2. The mystical body of Christ, or the spiritual universal church or Kingdom of God, is ONE BODY. This includes all of God's redeemed children of all denominations, of all nations, and of all generations.

### B. One Spirit

1. This refers to the Holy Spirit
2. Just as the human body has the animating spirit to give it life, so this one body has the animating Holy Spirit to give it life.
3. See Gen. 2:7, where God made man's body and then breathed his life-giving spirit into the body, so that man became a living soul.
4. Just as the H.S. regenerated or gave spiritual life to the individual, so He now maintains the vital connection of each one with the others and with Christ the Head.

### C. One Hope

1. The hope of the resurrection and Heaven with all its glory.
2. The hope of the consummation of Christian unity which is obviously yet in the future.
3. We have not yet arrived at the perfection to which we have been called.

### D. One Lord

1. The body can have only one head.
2. There cannot be many masters -- only One.
3. One of the tragedies of Christendom is the assumption that the Lord is absent from the body and must therefore be represented by vicars, archbishops, or other human heads.
  - a. To Paul the Lord is PRESENT.
  - b. He exercises His Lordship directly through his spiritual presence in the body.

### E. One Faith

1. One act of trust in Christ for salvation.
2. The same condition of salvation for everyone.
3. Nothing here to indicate that Paul has in mind primarily one system of doctrine or creed.
4. To Paul, faith is not a creed, but a living personal relationship or trust in Jesus Christ.
5. When acceptance of a body of doctrines or creed is substituted for this life-giving relationship to the one Lord, the signs of spiritual decay are already present in the body.



## F. One Baptism

1. This probably refers to water baptism as a Christian ordinance, although some say it refers to the Baptism with the Spirit.
2. Because of the tragic distortions which have arisen in the practice of baptism, and even in the MEANING of baptism, it is difficult today for us to realize the force of Paul's appeal to the "one baptism."
3. What was to him then a sign of unity, has become to us today the unfortunate symbol of division.
4. Baptism is the way in which oneness with Christ in His death & res. is declared & confessed.

## G. One God

1. To a man with <sup>the</sup> Jewish heritage of Paul, the oneness of God was the cardinal fact of his being.
2. All unity derived from this fundamental unity in the nature of God.
3. This one God is Father of all of us who are in the one body of Christians.  
The "us" refers to Christians and not to universal mankind.

## III. UNITY DOES NOT RULE OUT INDIVIDUALITY OR PERSONAL IDENTITY.

- A. Immediately following this magnificent description of the unity of the body, Paul corrects any possible misunderstanding of this unity by reminding us that "grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (4:7)
- B. Thus, the individuality of each member of the body is preserved, avoiding any idea of absorption and loss of personal identity.
- C. At the same time the variety of gifts for the proper functioning of the body is stressed, 4:7-16.



D. Paul is saying that these gifts serve the purpose of training (equipping) the saints (not just a few leaders, but all the members) for the work of ministry with a view to building up the body of Christ, vs 12.

E. The ultimate goal is to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (4:13)

F. In vs. 16 Paul reached the highest expression of his doctrine of the church --  
the growing up of the body into him who is the head,  
into Christ,  
from Whom the whole body draws its life.

2 Feb. 64, Cent. Ch. Augsburg



## Church Holds Interest of Princess

MADRID (AP) — Princess Irene of the Netherlands appears more interested in religion than in romance at the moment, close associates of the 24-year-old Dutch girl said here.

They were commenting on the announcement from The Hague that she joined the Catholic Church nearly a year ago, and on widespread reports here and in Holland that she had been linked romantically with various Spanish youths of noble blood.

"The princess is seriously interested at the moment in two things —and neither of them is romance," said one associate. "They are religion in all its phases and her intense study of the Spanish language. Both have resulted in her frequent and prolonged visits to Spain."

This source said the princess, genuinely interested in the union of all Christians, chose the Catholic Church because she considers it the best vehicle for attainment of that goal. This fact, the source said, was a major factor in Princess Irene's conversion from her family's conventional Protestantism. faith.

Madrid's morning newspapers gave top importance to the announcement that the Dutch princess had become a Catholic. The Catholic daily "Ya" published the story on its first news page and the monarchist daily "ABC" devoted a full page to the reports from The Hague on Princess Irene.

Meanwhile, Princess Irene continued her Madrid visit with the Dutch ambassador and his wife. She went sightseeing, shopped, attended Catholic mass, and studied her Spanish.