

# *One Faith*

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The “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5 is utilized by many well-meaning Christians to promote divisions within the body of Christ. Today, there are over twenty-five ruptures within the Stone/Campbell movement that lay claim to this passage as their own unique property. The “one faith” is **not** generally associated with Jesus as the object of faith, that is to say, God’s way of salvation by grace through faith, but rather the “one faith” is usually linked with doctrinal creeds set forth by individual splinter groups. If one endorses instrumental music, then, according to the opposition, one is not adhering to the “one faith.” In other words, for some believers, the “one faith” is acappella singing, not instrumental accompaniment. For one to sing with instrumental accompaniment during a so-called worship service is tantamount to treason against God.

This is just one of the numerous problems that carves up the Churches of Christ into various warring factions. For instance, there are some groups within the Churches of Christ that raise objections to the employment of individual communion cups and Sunday school.<sup>1</sup> According to this out-of-the-ordinary fellowship of believers, the users of individual communion cups and Sunday school are interrupting the “one faith” in Ephesians. This catalog of creedal statements for faithfulness is almost never-ending. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Paul’s “one faith” in light of its context in order to promote the unity for which Paul pleads. Having said this, this essay will also explore other books written by Paul, Luke, and Peter in order to lend a helping hand in comprehending more fully the meaning found in the Ephesian passage. This in-depth study will explore Ephesians 4:5 in light of its full context—the Book of Ephesians as a book. Douglas J. Moo (b. 1950), professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, sums up perfectly the need to read a book as a book, not Scriptures in isolation from their intended meaning:

One of the biggest mistakes we can make in reading the Bible is to read paragraphs in isolation from one another. Certain devotional books, by selecting daily readings from all over the Bible, unfortunately encourage this practice. But the biblical authors meant their books to be read as books. Reading a paragraph chosen at random from the middle of, say, 2 Kings is something like reading a paragraph in isolation from the middle of the latest John Grisham novel. To be sure, the various biblical genres are not really comparable to a modern novel, and some of the genres require far less

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<sup>1</sup>In spite of these beliefs, this fellowship is composed of individuals who wish to be true to the Word of God. I personally know many men and women who are a part of this fellowship, and they are some of the godliest individuals that one can expect to meet.

sequential reading than others (e.g., the Psalms). But the point is still valid. We can get the full meaning from any text of Scripture only as we appreciate the way the author intended it to function in the context of his whole book.<sup>2</sup>

One goal of this investigation of this misunderstood Scripture is to read Ephesians as a whole in order to determine how the word *faith* is employed. This chapter will seek to set forth the word *faith* in its context, that is, the entire book, not some isolated passage cited to give credence to our brand of orthodoxy. This subject about “faith” is of such vital importance for the preservation of the unity for which Paul advocates in his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus that it is necessary to develop this theme of “one faith” in order to assist individuals in keeping the “unity of the Spirit” (4:3).

As we reflect upon Paul’s seven “ones” for harmony among the Ephesians,<sup>3</sup> we quickly discover that number five (“one faith”) is used by many Christians, as stated above, as a means of justification for disassociation from anyone who refuses to subscribe to their peculiar interpretation of Scriptures. This Scripture is wrenched from its context to justify separation from every individual who refuses to kowtow, or bow in deep respect, to the dictates of a particular factious group. Finally, this chapter will briefly investigate the Churches of Christ and their dilemma in lifting Ephesians 4:5 from the author’s intended meaning.

### **EXEGESIS OR EISEGESIS?**

We should step back and look at the Book of Ephesians as a whole in order to capture the intent of the author’s use of the phrase “one faith.” What is the focus of this expression? If we seek to make points that the biblical author did not aim to formulate, then we engage in eisegesis (reading into) rather than exegesis (drawing out from). In other words, when we engage in exegesis, we obtain the meaning of the passage by drawing the meaning from the context rather than reading into the text our own preconceived ideas, likes, dislikes, and so on.

We must learn to listen anew to the biblical text. We are so use to reading the Bible as many godly preachers and teachers have taught us that for us to deny traditions is tantamount to denying the Bible. As we approach Ephesians 4:5, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to our particular group, or interpretative community. Because of tradition(s), we must seek to uncover the mind of the author through his own writings; otherwise, we can postulate various theories that are like a labyrinth<sup>4</sup> from which we can hardly find our way out of the tangle. This study seeks to remove a lot of the underbrush that has entangled so many of God’s people.

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<sup>2</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 271.

<sup>3</sup>The seven ones are: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord one faith, one baptism, and one God (Ephesians 4:3-6)

<sup>4</sup>Labyrinth: something extremely complex or tortuous in structure.

## GOD'S MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION

The problem that hinders so many Christians is confusion over the word *faith* (πίστις *pistis*). The word *faith* can refer to that which is the channel through which the righteousness of God is imputed to men and women—subjective faith (inward faith—Romans 1:16-17), or the word *faith* can suggest the message of Good News proclaimed to the world—objective faith (the mystery—Ephesians 4:5). Also the word *faith* can indicate faithfulness on the part of individuals who put their trust in God's message of reconciliation. This chapter develops the thesis that the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5 is the event of Jesus Christ Himself, also spoken of as “the mystery of His will” (1:9). In other words, the event is proclaimed as the Gospel, that is to say, the means whereby God saves the world. In my judgment, the “one faith” is not good news *about* the various creeds of Christendom, but rather it is Good News about salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary *for* men and women. The word *faith* can be used as a synonym for “the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup>

### MEANING OF ONE FAITH IN EPHESIANS 4:5

This study calls attention to the subjective (personal) element of faith as well as to two different interpretations of “faith” as objective, that is, (1) a message of salvation—Jesus as the object of private faith, and (2) a compendium of theology—a partisan creed. As we peruse the many great commentators, we quickly discover that the commentaries, as a whole, all seem to be in trouble concerning the exact meaning of Paul's expression—“one faith.” There are basically three concepts, as mentioned above, advanced concerning the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5: (1) the quality of faith in the individual [subjective], (2) Jesus is the “one faith” [objective], and (3) a compendium of theology [objective].

One of the most popular interpretations of this expression is that faith is a “compendium of theology,”<sup>6</sup> especially within the Churches of Christ. For many Christians, this concept of a compendium of theology, through isolation from context, appears to have some validity, but, on a deeper reading of the context of 4:5, we discover problems with this presupposition. This understanding of faith as a compendium of theology is the culprit that has splintered the body of Christ into painful splinters.

### OVERVIEW OF THE WORD FAITH AS EMPLOYED IN SOME NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

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<sup>5</sup>Robert B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 211.

<sup>6</sup>Each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ sets forth its own “compendium of theology” that we must adhere to in order for us to be recognized as a faithful child of God. Each faction maintains that its understanding of Christian dogma is the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5. This misunderstanding has opened the floodgates for division on every street corner.

Before analyzing the word *faith* in Ephesians 4:5, it would be helpful to briefly observe this word *faith* in other New Testament books in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this misused word. Just a casual review of the word *faith* in the New Testament reveals a sense that is not commonly maintained by many Christians within the Churches of Christ. Even though we encounter “faith” as a subjective condition of salvation (the means whereby one appropriates salvation by grace), still, we must never forget that the object of subjective faith is Jesus Christ. The two are wedded together. Subjective faith and objective faith are so intertwined throughout Scripture that it is sometimes difficult to determine which is which. In Paul’s first letter to Corinth, he speaks of their subjective faith: “so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:5). As a result of Paul’s message and preaching, the Corinthians believed (subjective faith). Then he develops the substance of his message and preaching, which in essence is the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5. Listen to Paul as he elaborates on the object of their faith:

**We do**, however, **speak a message of wisdom** among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup>No, **we speak of God’s secret wisdom**, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. <sup>8</sup>**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**  
(1 Corinthians 2:6-8)

It is in this same vein that Peter, too, speaks of subjective and objective faith in his discourse on the Day of Pentecost. He emphasized subjective faith—faith in Jesus—as prerequisite to salvation. Yet, this subjective faith had Jesus as its object. This subjective faith had to do with justifying faith, that is to say, faith is the means whereby God imputes to man and woman His righteousness. Faith is the means whereby we appropriate the salvation offered to us by grace. Yes, Jesus is the object of subjective faith, a faith that results in eternal life. Once more, Peter tells the people: “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:21). We must exercise faith in the “one Lord.” Once we have been put in a right relationship with God through personal faith in Jesus, then we seek to bring our lives into harmony with our new relationship with God through Jesus (Romans 6). It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Philippians:

Whatever happens, **conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man **for the faith of the gospel**. (Philippians 1:27)

## FAITH” IN THE BOOK OF ACTS<sup>7</sup>

As we peruse any book of the New Testament, we must determine the meaning to be attached to the term *faith*. For example, how is the word *faith* employed in Philippians 1:27? In this verse, Paul speaks of “The faith of the gospel.” The context reveals that “the faith of the gospel” is nothing other than the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The context is the deciding factor. This is also true as we turn our attention to the word *faith* in the Book of Acts. As we seek to understand subjective and objective faith, we must always look at the context. For instance, Luke gives insight into the subjective element of *faith* in his reporting of the selecting of the seven deacons to oversee the work of charity (Acts 6:1-6). In this section, Luke speaks of Stephen as “a man **full of faith** and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5). The word *faith* in this context appears to be subjective faith. On the other hand, Luke calls attention to “the faith” as objective in his recounting of how the Word of God spread: “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became **obedient to the faith**” (6:7; see also Romans 1:5; 10:16; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). In these verses, “obedience to the faith” means the acceptance of Jesus as the means of salvation.

In this section (Acts 6:1-6), we discern the word *faith* employed in two different senses. We must look at the context in order to arrive at the sense to be attached to the word *faith*. Since the object of subjective faith is belief in Jesus, we can surmise that a large number of priests accepted Jesus as the Anointed One of God, which is what it means to be “obedient to the faith.” Sometimes the phrase “obedience to the faith” (ὀπήκουον τῇ πίστει *Juphkouon th pistei* “obeyed the faith” [Acts 6:7]) can also refer to one’s ethical behavior.<sup>8</sup> Here again, we must always consult the context in trying to ascertain the correct meaning. Luke also records the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin concerning “the faith,” even though the words *the faith* are not employed, nevertheless, the following response to the Sanhedrin by Peter reveals that this is the

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<sup>7</sup>This section does not cover Paul’s third missionary journey. I suggests that you read the entire Book of Acts for yourself and give special attention to all of the sermons reported by Luke. This reading should give you a feel for subjective faith and objective faith. One implies the other; one cannot, in its strictest sense, divorce one from the other. Even though one may lay emphasis on one without mentioning the other, still one must never forget that ultimately the two belong together.

<sup>8</sup>This phrase “obedience to the faith” is interpreted by various scholars as the “content of faith” (objective), but, on the other hand, some scholars assume that “obedience to the faith” is dealing with ethical behavior. We cannot deny that there must be obedience to the faith in that sense. But, the question is, is that the meaning attached to the phrase by Paul? See John Murray *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 13, for faith as an act of obedience, or commitment to the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15, takes the phrase to be equivalent to the message of salvation. He says,

The obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation (Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 89f.). The missionary situation has given both noun and verb their predominant meaning, and the characteristic linking of faith and obedience in Paul has a meaning which is not primarily ethical but, as is especially clear in 2 Cor. 10:4-6, eschatological: When the revelation of Christ is accepted, the rebellious world submits again to its Lord. This understanding of faith corresponds to the apostle’s Kyrious Christology.

substance of his statement: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (4:12).

## FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

### Island of Cyprus

The Book of Acts covers a period of approximately thirty years, beginning with Jerusalem and ending in Rome. Approximately eighteen years after Peter’s message about salvation through Jesus, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark began their first missionary tour. Their first adventure was on the island of Cyprus (about AD 48). They landed at Salamis and proclaimed “**the word of God**” in the Jewish synagogues (13:5). After this proclamation about Jesus, both men went to Paphos (13:6) and were immediately summoned by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, because “he wanted to **hear the word of God**” (13:7). What did he hear? He heard about “the faith” through the proclamation of “the word of God.” Immediately upon hearing this word, Luke informs his readers that Elymas, the sorcerer, “tried to turn the proconsul from **the faith**” (13:8). In verse 8, we immediately detect that “the faith” is employed objectively. Luke uses synonymous terms to describe the message of salvation. Whether we refer to the message of salvation as “the word of God” or “the faith,” we are speaking of the same Christ event in this context.

### Pisidian Antioch

On this same tour, the three set sail for Perga in Pamphlia, but John Mark returned to Jerusalem (13:13). Paul and Barnabas continued this missionary trip through Pisidian Antioch (13:14—275 miles NW of Paphos). During this period of evangelism, Paul preached “the faith.” Luke informs his readers that Paul preached Jesus. In the course of his sermons, he said, “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that **through Jesus** the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup> **Through him** everyone **who believes** is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (13:38-39).

### Iconium

From there they went to Iconium (14:1, 71 miles SE of Antioch) and preached. Luke writes: “a great number of the **Jews and Gentiles believed**” (14:1). This is subjective faith on the part of the Jews and Gentiles. What did they believe? They believed the message about God’s grace (14:3), which is also called the “good news” (14:7). In other words, they accepted Jesus as God’s way of salvation. Jesus is always the object of our personal faith. In verse 3, this Gospel (the faith) is called “the word of his grace,” but, in verse 7, this message is referred to as the “good news.” Again, one observes the various phraseologies employed by Luke to express the same thing.

## Lystra

After leaving Iconium, they left for Lystra (14:8, 14 miles S of Iconium) and preached the “good news” about salvation through Jesus (14:15). Some Jews came from Antioch and stirred up the people against Paul. As a result of this confrontation, the citizens stoned Paul and left him for dead (14:19), the disciples got Paul and took him back into the city.

## Derbe

The next day, both Paul and Silas journeyed to Derbe (14:20, 46 miles SE of Lystra). Luke says, “They **preached the good news** in that city and won a large number of disciples” (14:21). After preaching Jesus in Derbe, Luke reports to his readers that Paul and Barnabas revisited the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (14:21). Luke summarizes the results of their return to these cities with the following words: “strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to **remain true to the faith**” (14:22). Once more, we observe the phraseology employed to convey the same concept. To say that they “preached the good news” (v. 21) is the same as saying “the faith” (v. 22 = the gospel). “The faith” in verse 22 is objective; this “good news” appears to be the “one faith,” according to context, in Ephesians 4:5.

Earlier, Paul in his sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch identifies what “the faith” is all about: “From this man’s (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised” (Acts 13:23). After this announcement, he again zeros in on the very heart of the Gospel (the faith):

Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup>Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (13:38-39)

These verses describe “the faith” in an objective sense. Jesus is the object of subjective faith (who believes).

## SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

### Philippi

Just a brief overview of Paul’s second missionary journey also reveals the same scenario. Luke reveals that Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to go to the region of Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from “preaching the word in the province of Asia” (16:6). Eventually, the trio, along with Luke, went into Europe to preach the Good News of God. One of Paul’s first converts was Lydia. Luke says that God opened her heart to respond to “Paul’s message” (16:14). Following this encounter, a girl followed Paul and Silas shouting: “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling the way to be saved” (16:17). Following this episode, Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in prison (16:23), Luke informs his readers of an earthquake and the conversion of the jailor. The jailor inquired as to what he

must do to be saved. Paul's response was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (16:31). But, Luke does not stop with just the phrase "believe in the Lord Jesus"; but rather, he then told him about the One he should believe in. Listen once more to Luke as he recounts this particular event: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (16:32).

## Thessalonica

After this episode, Paul went to Thessalonica, then to Berea, and then to Athens (17:1-32). In Thessalonica many Jews and Gentiles rejected "obedience to the faith." During this second missionary journey, while in Corinth, Paul wrote his second epistle (AD 52) to that congregation in which he issued a warning to those who refused to heed the message of salvation through Christ:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup>**He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.** <sup>9</sup>They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power <sup>10</sup>on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

For one not to "obey the gospel" is to reject Jesus as God's Anointed One. It is the same as that which John addresses when he writes:

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** <sup>12</sup>**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—**<sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:10-13)

From the Thessalonian correspondence, we quickly learn that many Jews were not "obedient to the faith," which equals Paul's phraseology "obey the gospel." For one not to obey the Gospel was equivalent to one not being obedient to the faith, which simply means that one does not receive Him.

## Berea

Wherever this missionary group converged, they immediately went to the Jewish synagogue to tell them about the message of salvation (Acts 17:11). Luke informs his readers that the Bereans received the message with eagerness (17:11). The Jews from Thessalonica learned of Paul's behavior in Berea and went there to disrupt the "preaching" of Paul. Luke says that "Paul was **preaching the word of God**" at Berea (17:13). We cannot read about the events of Paul and his traveling companions in the various towns without cognizance of the various synonymous expressions used to describe the Gospel of God. In this short section dealing with

the activities concerning the Word, we observe that the preaching about Jesus is called “the message of salvation” (17:11) and “the word of God” (17:13).

## Athens

In Athens, Luke identifies the message as “the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (17:18). Wherever Paul and his companions went, they preached the “one faith” that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:5. This “one faith” is the “good news about Jesus and his resurrection.” For the full text of Paul’s encounter with the Athenians, we should read Acts 17:16-34. Toward the end of Paul’s proclamation about Jesus, he says to the Athenians:

“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. **He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.**”<sup>32</sup> **When they heard about the resurrection of the dead,** some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.”<sup>33</sup> At that, Paul left the Council.<sup>34</sup> A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. (17:31-34)

Some who heard the message about Jesus and His resurrection were like some of the Jews from Thessalonica; they refused to “obey the gospel” (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Some, after hearing the message of salvation, were “obedient to the faith” (see Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26). We stand almost awestruck as we catch a glimpse of the various ways the preaching of Jesus is described. The terminology employed helps us to promptly observe that no one term was used exclusively for the “one faith” that Paul chooses in Ephesians to describe the “mystery of God,” which is none other than Jesus, the hope of glory.

## Corinth

After his visit and preaching in Athens, Paul went to Corinth (Acts 18:1). Immediately Luke focuses his camera on Paul to give Theophilus, the one to whom the book was actually written (1:1), some details as to the activities of Paul in Corinth: “Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (18:4). In the meantime, Timothy and Silas joined Paul from Macedonia (18:5). After their arrival, Luke says that Paul now exclusively devoted himself to preaching about Jesus. Once more, we get a clear insight into the core, or heart, of the message of Paul to the Corinthians. Listen to Luke as he captures the gist of the message of salvation:

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.<sup>6</sup> But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” (18:5-6)

After Paul moved the base of his operations from the synagogue to the house of Crispus, the synagogue ruler, we discover that God appeared to Paul to give him the spiritual resolve to

continue to teach the Corinthians “the word of God” (18:7-12). Paul was informed by God to “keep on speaking, do not be silent.” Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (AD 55), he reflected upon his stay: “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the **testimony about God**.<sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Then as Paul closed this letter, he once more reminded them of his message:

Now, brothers, **I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you**, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.<sup>2</sup> **By this gospel you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.<sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures,<sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures,<sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.<sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.<sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,<sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (15:1-8)

## “FAITH” IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

About ten years after the first missionary journey (AD 57), Paul writes to the Romans about this faith, which he calls “my gospel” and “the revelation of the mystery”:

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to **my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to **the revelation of the mystery** kept secret since the world began<sup>26</sup> but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith**—<sup>27</sup>to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, NKJV)

Again, we perceive synonymous expressions employed to describe faith in its objective sense: (1) “my gospel,” (2) “preaching of Jesus Christ,” (3) “the revelation of the mystery,” and (4) “obedience to the faith.” In the Book of Romans, we witness Paul employing “faith” sometimes in a subjective sense, but at other times, it is employed in an objective sense. The context is the deciding factor. Just as Paul concludes his Book with “obedience to the faith” (**εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως**, *eis hypakoēn pisteōs*, “for obedience of faith,” 16:26) so he begins his Book with the same phraseology (1:5). In 1:3-4, Paul describes the message of the Gospel, in verse 5, he describes what God expects of individuals who hear the message about Christ. This is basically the same scenario that Paul expresses in Romans 10:1-4. In these verses, Paul calls attention to the Jews’ refusal of Jesus as the means of receiving God’s righteousness. Thus, Paul expresses this rejection of “obedience of faith” as “did not submit to God’s righteousness” (10:3). The full context of this section is:

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.<sup>2</sup> For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but **their zeal is not based on knowledge**.<sup>3</sup> Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, **they did not submit to God’s righteousness**.<sup>4</sup> Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (10:1-4)

**Obedience of Faith**  
**Equals**  
**Submission to God's Righteousness through Jesus**

“Obedience of faith” means acceptance of the message of salvation by grace through faith. Whenever Paul speaks of submission to God’s righteousness (Romans 10:3), he is essentially saying the same thing in 1:5. It is through faith that we accept the righteousness of God. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means whereby God chooses to make salvation available to us (1:16-17). Listen to Paul following his discourse on Abraham and faith:

Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (5:1-2)

“Through faith” is employed in a subjective sense, but this subjective faith must have for its object Jesus. It is, “We have peace with God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**.” Jesus is “the faith.” The faith is not a collection of twenty-seven books; the faith is not instrumental music; it is not acappella singing; it is not grape juice or wine only in the Lord’s Supper; it is not bread breaking or bread pinching in the observance of the Lord’s Supper; **it is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God**, the Savior of the World. This is “the faith” that Paul preached wherever he went. Paul expresses this concept in a most forceful way in his letter to Rome: “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25).

Paul employs “faith” in a subjective sense as well as an objective sense (see Romans 10:1-17). Again, the context is the determinative factor. In writing Romans, we cannot help but wonder if Paul had not reflected upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. In Christ’s conversation with Nicodemus, He sets forth subjective and objective faith as essential to eternal life. One’s subjective faith must have Jesus as its object. Pay attention to Jesus as He explains to Nicodemus how we come to have eternal life:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life.<sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.<sup>18</sup> **Whoever believes in him** is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)

The object of belief is Jesus. As we read carefully Ephesians 4:5, the context must determine whether the “one faith” is subjective or objective. When we move toward Ephesians 4:5, we detect that many scholars also speak of this “one faith” as subjective, but, at the same time, they call attention to Jesus as the object of this “one faith.” Some scholars advance the notion that the “one faith” refers to that quality of faith in the individual, which enables him or her to believe. Yet, the subjective element appears to be expressed already in the “one Lord,” the fourth of the seven ones. This concept of the “one faith” as personal (subjective faith) seems

to be at odds with the context,<sup>9</sup> even though we must have subjective faith in order to receive the righteousness of Christ. Whatever the answer is to a proper interpretation of “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5, we must never forget that we cannot ultimately separate personal faith from its object (Jesus). On the other hand, we can never separate Jesus from personal faith if we expect salvation

It goes almost without saying that there must be subjective faith in Jesus, but, at the same time, we ought to be conscious as to how Paul employs “one faith” in this context. In other words, there must be faith (subjective) in “the faith” (objective), which is Christ. In Ephesians, Paul employs both usages of the word *faith*. What we turn up in the reading of Ephesians is that subjective faith and objective faith (Jesus the object of faith) are like two sides of a coin. Both must be involved for salvation. Yet, in Ephesians 4:5, the context seems to use “one faith” for the “Gospel.” It is in this vein that Klyne Snodgrass pungently captures the intent of Paul’s use of the phrase:

“One faith” looks back to the explanation of the gospel in 2:1-10, but reference here is not the act of believing. “Faith” is used here by metonymy for that which is believed, the content of the faith. The statement means there is only one gospel.<sup>10</sup>

The context of Ephesians 4:5 does not appear to use *pistis* in the subjective sense as utilized by Paul in Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone who believes**: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>17</sup>For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, **a righteousness that is by faith from first to last**, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

This passage (1:16-17) speaks of faith in a subjective sense. God has chosen faith as the means whereby man receives salvation. In Romans 4, Paul speaks of Abraham’s faith: “What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham **believed God**, and it was credited to him as righteousness’” (verse 5). This faith is subjective faith on the part of Abraham. Once more, Paul expresses this subjective faith as the means whereby God imputes to man His righteousness:

And he received the sign of circumcision, **a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith** while he was still uncircumcised. So then, **he is the father of all who believe** but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (4:11)

Paul begins this epistle (Romans) with a brief synopsis of “the faith” (1:3-4) and then concludes his remarks with submission to that faith (1:5). Keep your mind on Paul as he captures the very heart of the gospel and one’s response to Jesus (“the faith”):

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<sup>9</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 107.

<sup>10</sup>Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 199.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup>the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures <sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, <sup>4</sup>and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. <sup>5</sup> Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (1:1-5)

The NIV's translation of 1:5 is understood by many as subjective faith, not objective faith as presented in this study. We cannot determine from the translation which meaning the translators intended to convey. In other words, did the translators understand the phraseology as meaning ethical obedience that comes from faith or obedience that results in the acceptance of Jesus as God's Anointed One for the salvation of the world? We are not denying that there must be ethical obedience to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, but the issue in Romans 1:5 is: Is "obedience of faith" the message of salvation? It is in this same vein that Douglas J. Moo oscillates, so it seems to me, between subjective and objective faith in 1:5.<sup>11</sup> Since Paul is not here to clarify the issue for the Christian community, then Christians today must try to arrive at a correct application through the context. Is Paul addressing the same issue in his examination of the Jews' rejection of Jesus? Pay attention to Paul as he deals with "obedience of faith" in Romans 10:8-17:

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, **the word of faith we are proclaiming:** <sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, "**Anyone who trusts in him** will never be put to shame." <sup>12</sup> For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup> for, "**Everyone who calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And **how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?** And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" <sup>16</sup> **But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.** For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" <sup>17</sup> Consequently, **faith comes from hearing the message,** and the **message is heard through the word of Christ.**

"The word of faith we are proclaiming" is Jesus. This is the same message about Christ in verse 17. Many Israelites rejected the "good news" (verse 16) about Jesus as God's way of salvation. "The word of faith" would be equivalent to the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), in his monumental commentary on Romans, grappled with this very issue:

*To the obedience of faith.*—Paul, as an Apostle, was commissioned to preach the Gospel in order to the obedience of faith. Some understand this of the obedience which faith produces; but the usual

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<sup>11</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 41-43. He has some excellent comments, but, at the same time, the phrase, so it seems, in light of its context, still bears the earmark of submission to the message of the Gospel.

import of the expression, as well as the connection in this place, determines it to apply to the belief of the Gospel. Obedience is no doubt an effect produced by that belief; but the office of an Apostle was, in the first place, to persuade men to believe the Gospel. This is the grand object, which includes the other. The Gospel reforms those who believe it; but it would be presenting an imperfect view of the subject to say that it was given to reform the world. It was given that men might believe and be saved. The obedience, then, here referred to, signifies submission to the doctrine of the gospel.<sup>12</sup>

## “FAITH” IN THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

A few years earlier (AD 54), Paul wrote to the Corinthians about “the gospel I preached to you” (1 Corinthians 15:1). But he does not stop with just that statement; he continues to define what it was that he preached (15:2-4). As Paul wraps up this epistle, he writes: “Be on your guard; stand firm in **the faith**; be men of courage; be strong” (16:13). Paul begins this epistle with both objective faith (the message) and subjective faith (belief on the part of those who responded to the message of salvation:

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, **God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.**<sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,<sup>23</sup> but **we preach Christ crucified:** a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,<sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.<sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. (1:21-25)

“The foolishness of what was preached” is objective faith (Jesus crucified), but the words, “to save those who believe” is subjective faith. The Corinthians were to “stand firm in **the faith.**” One can hardly read “the faith” in the Corinthians passage without reflecting, once more, upon the context in Ephesians 4:5, which appears to focus on Jesus as God’s liberating initiative to bring about peace and break down the wall of partition that separates Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). One must emphasize, and not forget, that subjective faith has as its object the Anointed One of God. “The faith” in 1 Corinthians 16:13 and the “one faith” (miva pivsti", mia pistis) in Ephesians 4:5 and “obedience of faith” in Romans 1:5 and “the faith” in Colossians 1:23 seem to refer to the same thing, namely, the gospel of hope. In the Colossians’ passage, Paul writes:

If indeed you continue in **the faith** (τῇ πίστει, *tē pistei*), grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:23) [NKJV]

The context of this statement—“continue in the faith”—appears to be Christ, the hope of glory. As one reflects upon the fuller context, one quickly discovers that Paul identifies “the faith” as Christ. Take note once more to Paul as he expounds upon his thoughts in 1:23:

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans*, reprinted 1971 (Marshalltown, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, original date not given), 30-31.

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, **the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations**, but now has been revealed to His saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of **this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**.<sup>28</sup> Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (1:24-29) [NKJV]

From this context, it appears that “the faith” equals “the mystery” and “the mystery” equals “Christ, the hope of glory.” Even if we interpret, as many commentators do, “one faith” as subjective in Ephesians 4:5 and not as objective, we must also observe that these same scholars also advance the idea that Christ is the object of this subjective faith, not some creedal statement as postulated by the various religious bodies. For example, H.C.G. Moule addresses the controversy this way as he seeks to correct the erroneous view that the “one faith” is a creed, unless we speak of this creed as Christ:

Πίστις (*Pistis*) is here explained not of the Christian’s creed but of the Christians trust. I believe this to be required, or at least strongly suggested by the general use of the word πίστις (*pistis*) in the writings of Paul. Hardly ever, if ever, does he use it distinctly in the sense of creed. Of course some “creed,” however brief is required in order to “trust,” if it is to be trust in the trustworthy Object. But this is not in question where we are examining the use of the word πίστις (*pistis*).

If faith is subjective, Moule is saying that Jesus is still the object of this subjective faith. Jesus is the creed. If “one faith” were creedal in nature, then this “one faith” would be Jesus, the hope of glory. Even though Moule interprets “one faith” as subjective, he still speaks of Christ as the object of this “one faith.” He does reject the “one faith” as a compendium of theology, that is to say, a partisan creed. In this same vein of “one faith” as subjective, Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida are forthright in their criticism of interpreting the “one faith” as a creed, that is to say, “a compendium of theology”:

One faith: the Christian message is one, not many, and it calls for the same faith, belief, commitment from all who accept it. It is doubtful that here the Greek word for “faith” means “creed” (as Murray would define it). In this context one faith must refer to “one way in which we may trust God” or . . . “trust Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

These two scholars deny that the “one faith” is creedal in nature, but, on the other hand, both appear to be saying that the “one faith” is subjective with Christ as its object. We cannot deny that there is subjectivity on the part of the one who looks to Christ as the author and finisher of his or her salvation, but if we place emphasis upon a written creed (objective—compendium of theology) and not upon “the faith,” namely Jesus, then we weaken, to some

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<sup>13</sup>Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 96.

extent, the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning Jesus as the unifying factor in reconciling the world unto Himself.<sup>14</sup>

It is difficult for scholars to choose between the subjective and objective sense, especially since it is almost impossible to separate the two concepts in an absolute sense. Neither concept can be far from the other. William Hendrickson expresses his views about the subjective nature of the "one faith," but he also cautions that we cannot separate the two:

Favoring the objective sense are Westcott and Lenski ("one truth"), though it is only fair to state that the latter does not entirely exclude the subjective meaning. He says, "'One faith' includes our personal believing, but the stress is on the Christian faith as such, on what constitutes its substance." Simpson refuses to choose. Hodge and Greijdanus accept the theory that the term as here used combines subjective and objective faith. Abbott, Grosheide, Roberson, and Scott favor the subjective sense (footnote 101).<sup>15</sup>

This controversy appears, so it seems to me, to be the case of scholars not reading the book as a book. They isolate this passage (Ephesians 4:5) from its context.<sup>16</sup> The seven ones are an absolute proof of unity. It appears that Paul is setting forth something that is outside oneself (Jesus as the object of our subjective faith) in order to withstand objective attacks against Jesus as God's way of salvation, which is the "one faith." Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that "faith" is employed in both senses in this epistle. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem humanity (see Ephesians 1:13; 2:8; 3:12, 17; see also Romans 1:16-17). Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). In Ephesians 4:5, Paul, so it seems, is appealing to something that can unite fallen humanity. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as subjective or objective does not detract from Paul's emphasis about unity. In other words, it is only subjective faith in Jesus as its object that can unite humanity into "one new man" (2:10-18).

Faith in Jesus puts everyone on an equal footing, not knowledge. If "one faith" refers to a compendium of creedal statements, whether written or unwritten, then unity cannot exist.<sup>17</sup> This faith, even though objective, is something that puts one into a right relationship with God. Jesus is the only one who can accomplish this feat. He is the message of salvation. The backdrop of this epistle does seem to indicate that the "one faith" is objective. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as personal (inward faith) or objective (Jesus), we cannot be too dogmatic in our presuppositions. In the Ephesian epistle, Paul discusses both subjective and objective faith. Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), New Testament Greek scholar and professor of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, also advances the idea that the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is

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<sup>14</sup>See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 186.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>16</sup>This concept will be dealt with more fully under an analysis of "faith" in Ephesians.

<sup>17</sup>It is not uncommon for some individuals within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies to deny that they have a written creed. On the surface this sounds excellent; but this is not true. The various religious journals advance a certain doctrinal stance, and then this becomes in essence the written creed for that particular body of believers. To disagree with the editors and church leaders of the various religious journals is, often times, tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself.

subjective. In the following statement by Wuest, he also calls attention to the fact that the “one faith” is not some human creed. He writes:

“Faith” is not the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine and its respective responsibilities. It refers to the principle of faith by means of which all the saints enter into salvation.<sup>18</sup>

We can concur with Wuest’s statement that the “Christian Faith” cannot be a “system of doctrine.” As we read the scholars, we discover that over and over the scholars draw attention to the fact that the “one faith” cannot be a religious creed. Why? Just a perusal of the religious scene reveals that a “compendium of theology” can never unite. This observation is self-evident from the many divisions that currently exist within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), author and editor, goes right to the heart of the cancer that inflicts almost every division within the Churches of Christ who interpret the “one faith” as credal in nature, that is, partisan creeds, not Jesus as the creed:

It is a startling commentary on the destructive violence of the party spirit when one realizes that otherwise good and gentle men are betrayed into equating the faith which all of us share in Christ Jesus with narrow partisan tests of communion.<sup>19</sup>

Both Wuest and Ketcherside reject the “one faith” as a credal statement concerning “a compendium of theology.” Even for those scholars who interpret the “one faith” subjectively, they see the “one faith” as subjective in the sense that “faith” is the one means whereby God saves humanity through Jesus. Even with this understanding though, the scholars still set forth the notion that Jesus is the object of one’s faith. In other words, “faith” is the means, or the instrument, through which God imputes His righteousness to those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. As stated earlier, it is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between subjective faith and objective faith, which in essence are simply two sides of the same coin. One necessitates the other. It is by faith (subjective) that all share in the “one body” of Christ. Once more, Carl Ketcherside captures the essence of this “one faith” or “the faith” in his precise commentary on Ephesians 4:5. He correctly writes that the “one faith” is Jesus and not a compendium of theology:

Compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. . . . It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he “was put to death for our trespasses, and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 96. Wuest may be correct in his analysis, but the whole context of the passage does not seem to bear out the conclusions of many godly scholars. If we would read the entire Book of Ephesians, we would discover that Paul, prior to his statement in Chapter 4 and verse 5, develops the scheme of God’s redemptive history in Jesus Christ. Everything centers on Jesus as the One who unites fragmented humanity. He is our peace who has broken down the middle wall of partition.

<sup>19</sup>Carl Ketcherside, “The One Faith,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 10 (October 1965): 149.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

## “FAITH” IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### Objective Faith (Jesus)

As stated above, we must consider the context of Ephesians 4:5 in order to ascertain the intended meaning Paul attaches to this particular phrase—“one faith.” He begins his epistle with the thought that God had blessed the Ephesian Christians with all spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-6). He informs them that it is in Christ that we obtain redemption through the blood of Jesus (1:7). He also calls attention to the mystery of God as to how He could justify sinful humanity:

And he made known to us **the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (1:9-10)

F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), Bible scholar and professor of biblical criticism and exegesis, equates the “mystery of Christ” with the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (cf. Galatians 1:12).<sup>21</sup> In other words, the “mystery of Christ” equals the “revelation of Jesus Christ” and the “gospel” equals both. Bruce says, “Christ is himself the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; cf. Col. 1:26-27).”<sup>22</sup> This “mystery” is defined in Ephesians 2:14-16, which is the creation in Christ of “one new man” (verse 15). This background helps to explain the phrase “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5.

As Paul reflects upon God’s method of salvation, he reflects upon the Gospel and their response:

And you also were included in Christ when **you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**. **Having believed**, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (1:13-14)

This “word of truth” and the “gospel of your salvation” are equivalent expressions to the “one faith.” Paul prayed that their eyes might be opened to understand something of the greatness of what God had accomplished in raising them from the dead (1:18—2:1-10). He further develops the fact that they were “dead in transgressions” (2:5, KJV). For instance, he informs them that

**God raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith**—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (2:6-10)

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<sup>21</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 313.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The object of this saving faith is Jesus. After Paul zeros in on “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (1:13, KJV), he then states their response to this gospel: “For this reason, ever since I heard about **your faith in the Lord Jesus** and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (1:15-16). Again, Paul does not stop there; he continues to develop this gospel with the following words: “And God **raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms **in Christ Jesus**, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**” (2:6-7). As cited above, Paul again expresses the means of salvation: “For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**” (2:8).

In the second chapter of Ephesians (vv. 11-22), Paul describes what the “one faith” is all about. Then in Chapter 3, he develops this “one faith” even further by describing the “one faith” as the “mystery,” which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is here that T. K. Abbott has a relevant word: “One Lord, Christ; one faith, of which He is the object, one in its nature and essence; and one baptism, by which we are brought into the profession of this faith.”<sup>23</sup> Whether we interpret faith as subjective, as Abbott, or objective (Jesus), the meaning is basically the same. In other words, even if faith is used subjectively, the object of our personal faith is in Jesus, not some compendium of theology advanced by some group within the Christian community.

The object of faith is none other than Jesus the Messiah. Again, Paul emphasizes the object of subjective faith with the following words: “For **through him** we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (2:18). Paul, throughout this short epistle, widens the “one faith.” In Chapter 3, verses 2-13, he discusses the “mystery” that he introduced in the beginning of this epistle (1:3-13). In Chapter 3, he writes: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise **in Christ Jesus**” (3:6). He then follows this statement with the following thought: “**In him** and **through faith in him** we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (3:12). The Greek text reads “through **the faith** of (in) him” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ, *dia ths pistews autou*). This comment by Paul is similar to a statement made some years earlier to the Galatians:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ <sup>16</sup> know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, **have put our faith in Christ Jesus** that we may be **justified by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)

The words “by faith in Jesus Christ” (διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, *dia pisteōs Christou*, “through faith of [in] Christ”) emphasize both the subjective (inward faith) and objective faith (Jesus). Then, in this same verse, Paul says, “So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus” (ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεῦσαμεν, *hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen*, “We in

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<sup>23</sup>T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, nd, latest impression 1991), 109.

Christ Jesus believed”). Paul does not stop there; he does not want his readers to misunderstand how an individual is put in a right relationship with God. Again, he nails the point to the wall, so to speak: “justified by faith in Christ” (δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ, *dikaiōthōmen ek pisteōs Christou*, “we might be justified by faith of [in] Christ”). F. F. Bruce does well to remind believers that

It is by this surpassingly rich grace of God, then, that salvation is secured for men and women. As in v. 5, “you have been saved” is equivalent to “you have been justified.” What Paul says here about salvation he says elsewhere about justification, which is freely bestowed by God’s grace (Rom. 3:24) and received “not on the ground of legal works but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16). “Through faith” here implies Jesus Christ as the object of that faith, as he is explicitly its object in Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:22, 26.<sup>24</sup>

In Ephesians 3:12 and 3:17, Paul, in speaking of faith, utilizes the definite article before faith in both verses.<sup>25</sup> Verse 17 reads: “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love” (διὰ τῆς πίστεως. *Dia ths pistews*, “through the faith”). Can we proclaim, or preach, “the faith”? Paul in his epistle to the Galatians writes:

Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now **preaching the faith** he once tried to destroy.” (Galatians 1:21-23)

These verses show that “preaching the faith” can function for Paul as a synonym for “the gospel.” Richard B. Hays, professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, correctly calls attention to the import of this passage (v. 23) in Galatians:

The expression “proclaiming the faith” in v. 23 also shows that “the faith” can function for Paul as a synonym for “the gospel.” “The faith” is not just a matter of inward attitudes of the heart; it alludes to the substantive content of Christian preaching, as summarized in kerygmatic formulas such as Gal 1:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This observation will prove important in interpreting other references to “faith” (pivsti" pistis) later in the letter.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 289.

<sup>25</sup>The definite article is often confusing in trying to arrive at the significance or its emphasis. The following note on the definite article in First Timothy 3:9 by Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans’ Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 273, is worthwhile reading:

9. but persons who hold the *mystery of the faith*. This marks one of fifteen uses of *pistis* in the PE with the article (versus eighteen anarthrous uses). Just as the appearance of the article does not designate the faith in terms of content in the PE, so the absence thereof does not signal simply the personal act of believing. The use (or nonuse) of the article has less to do with systematic theological distinctions than with the grammatical and rhetorical patterns of Hellenistic Greek.

<sup>26</sup>Richard B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians* in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 217.

## Objective Faith (Compendium of Theology)

Sometimes it is helpful to state a proposition in the negative in order to shed more light on its real meaning. The following is a brief analysis as to why I reject the traditional interpretation of the “one faith” as objective in the sense of a “party interpretation” of Scripture. As we glance at the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5, we have to determine in what sense Paul is employing the expression “one faith.” Is it a “compendium of theology” or is it “Jesus”? Upon a close reading, at least to me, we are cognizant that “faith” is objective, namely, Jesus. Yet, in spite of the context, many still want to hold on to “one faith” as representative of their particular brand of Christianity, but the question remains as to the meaning that we should attach to this objectivity. Among many Christian communities, the most prevalent concept is that it is objective in the sense that it represents a theological party creed, but this philosophy is riddled with insurmountable problems.

### CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THEIR DILEMMA

To illustrate the misapplication of Ephesians 4:5, this chapter names godly men who seek to be true to God, but, at the same time, we discover that these men are promoting division rather than the unity for which Paul calls for in Ephesians. The unity for which Paul calls in the Ephesian Epistle is based upon faith in the one Lord Jesus. Garland Elkins (Church of Christ), on the other hand, identifies the “one faith,” not as faith in the one Lord, but rather his particular understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Elkins writes an article on “The Silence of the Scriptures” in which he bemoans the fact that there are fellowships of believers who do not concur with his brand of orthodoxy. In this essay he discusses the so-called five acts of worship. In the following lengthy citation, he sets forth his understanding of the “one faith” as being associated with a worship service with five prescribed rituals within the Churches of Christ:

These five acts of worship were the *only acts* of worship that the early church practiced. We search in vain for any other acts of worship enjoined upon Christians today. Therefore to count beads as an act of worship is sinful. . . . The Bible does not say, “Thou shalt not use mechanical instruments of music in worship.” . . . One of the major differences between the churches of Christ and the Christian churches is: true churches of Christ are governed by what the Bible says. Christian churches are governed by what the Bible does not say. . . . The aim of true churches of Christ throughout the world is to restore Christianity as it was in the first century A.D. . . . In the final analysis whether people obey or disobey God is a matter of regard or disregard for the word of God. The only possible way for us to be united is to follow the simple plan of “speaking where the Bible speaks and by remaining silent where the Bible is silent” (1 Peter 4:11). . . . No one was ever asked, “Are you Protestant or Catholic?” for such did not exist. No one asked, “To which faith do you belong?” for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5). In a divided religious world the pleas of true churches of Christ everywhere is for a complete restoration of the Lord’s church. We plead for people to go back over all the dark ages of corruption, to discard man-made names, creeds, doctrines, and commandments of men in the plan of salvation and worship.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Garland Elkins, “The Silence of the Scriptures,” *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no., 1 (October 1973): 19-20.

Elkins (1926-2016) identifies the five acts of worship as: (1) teaching, (2) praying, (3) giving, (4) Lord's Supper, and (5) singing.<sup>28</sup> Elkins labors under the impression that God has ordained a worship service in which five acts (rituals) must be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be "true worship."<sup>29</sup> For those who do not conform to his particular interpretation of Scripture, they are not contending for the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.<sup>30</sup> Not only does he identify the "one faith" with five acts of worship, but he also identifies the Church of Christ as the "one faith." He excludes any other religious denomination from being a part of the "one faith." For us to be in the "one faith," we must be identified with his social gathering.

He says, as cited in the above citation: "No one was ever asked, 'Are you Protestant or Catholic?' for such did not exist. No one asked, 'To which faith do you belong?' for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5)." He excludes everyone from the "one faith" except his own splinter group. In his exposition of the "one faith," he fails to take into consideration that the distinctive religious body known as the Churches of Christ, which came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement, of which he is a part, did not exist prior to Alexander Campbell, one of the principle founders of this Reformation Movement.

On the other side of Elkins' unique fellowship, there is another exclusive association that is known as the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement within the Churches of Christ. This group of Christians also cites this same verse to condemn Elkins. Why? Well, according to their understanding of the New Testament, he is not adhering to the "one faith," which happens to be the one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers (the bread must remain in one piece—no fragmentation), and so on. They, like him, identify the "one faith," not with Jesus, but rather with their odd interpretation of the so-called worship service with its five rituals. Just a casual reading of Ephesians reveals that the "one faith" is not some creedal statement issued by the Churches of Christ, but rather, it is the "one Lord." Jesus is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.

This "one faith," as illustrated above, is the message of the Gospel, or the Word of God. If we interpret "one faith" as objective faith in the sense of a written creed, we again confront an impossible blockage. There is difficulty in applying this expression to a particular body of truth as is generally advanced by many within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. In seeking an answer to the above dilemma, we must inquire as to the following question: Is Paul speaking of an objective body of truth? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), protestant Christian minister, carefully calls attention to the difficulty:

In the eyes of these teachers 'one faith' means that Christians adopt and subscribe to one of the great Confessions of Faith, such as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England., or the Westminster confession of Faith, or the Heidelberg Catechism. Faith here, they say, means a complete outline of what we believe, a complete compendium of theology.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>31</sup>Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16*), 108. I am indebted to Lloyd-Jones for his exposition of this phrase.

Even though some Christians reject the many Confessions of Faith written by other believers, nevertheless, many of these same Christians adhere to an unwritten creed that is just as dogmatic and divisive as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and so on. When we set forth a doctrinal standard by which all must adhere to or face excommunication, we immediately catapult a movement that will fracture at the drop-of-a-hat. If we define “one faith” as dogmatic theology propounded by some meticulous group of believers, then there has never been nor will there ever be “one faith.” If “one faith” means agreement upon all doctrinal issues, then there was not even “one faith” in the days of the apostles. Thus, Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, correctly points out:

On and on it goes. We are judged more by what doctrines we hold to than by the hold we have on Jesus. One is not “faithful” unless he is acappella or non-class or amillennial or non-cooperative or direct support. A congregation is not of “the faith” unless it serves the Supper in a certain manner or restricts its budget to non-institutional programs. “Obedience to the faith,” a beautiful scriptural concept, is made to apply to every opinion imaginable, and if one does not kow-tow to a particular opinion, held to so dearly by the party, he is branded as *unfaithful*. And so we “convert” each other to our own sects, announcing to the world that someone has found “the faith” and is no longer in error. This usually has little to do with a person’s relationship to Jesus as Lord. If one leaves us, we presume that he has “departed from the faith,” when in fact he just might leave us for the sake of the faith.<sup>32</sup>

We cannot take the “one faith” to mean complete agreement about an absolute digest of doctrinal declaration in the written Word. For us to make the “one faith” mean total compliance in doctrinal matters, then our understanding would violate the very intent of this epistle. One thing that the scholars agree on is this: the “one faith” is not a system of dogmatic theology. Most scholars rule out this objective sense of a “compendium of theology,” period. In the early church, there were differences in understanding concerning many issues, but they were not accused of preaching another gospel, unless they added something to Jesus as God’s way of salvation. For example, Paul’s letter to the Corinthians reveals that Paul was conscious that within the Christian community believers were at various levels in understanding, but they were never accused of departing from “the faith.” We should listen in on Paul as he discusses limited knowledge within the Corinthian congregation. He writes:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. <sup>2</sup> **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.** <sup>3</sup> But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Within this short paragraph, Paul calls attention to the fact that no one knows everything, as he or she ought to know. Even though some laid claim to “we all possess knowledge,” nevertheless they were warned that knowledge can puff an individual up, but, on the other hand, love can build one up. It is true that some were right and some were wrong in their views concerning idols; yet, in spite of this deficiency in knowledge, Paul drove home the point that if

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<sup>32</sup>Leroy Garrett, “The Nature of Faith,” *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 303.

one loves God, then God knows this individual, in spite of famine in discernment. Just a perusal of the eighth chapter of First Corinthians reveals ignorance, on the part of some, concerning the Lord Jesus. Listen once more to Paul as he calls for toleration for the weak:

Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. <sup>7</sup> **But not everyone knows this.** Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:6-8)

Paul is conscious that there is just one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, but he goes on to say, “Not everyone knows this.” For a second time, we wonder why Paul did not accuse the weak Christians of abandoning the “one faith.” How did Paul deal with the ones who did not get the picture flawlessly? Again, we should pay attention to Paul as he seeks to capture the very heart of unity among the Corinthians:

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? <sup>11</sup> So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. <sup>12</sup> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (8:9-12)

Paul, too, deals with differences within the congregation at Rome. This epistle to the Romans is quite revealing in that Paul details how Christians are to get along, even when there were different viewpoints. Chapters fourteen and fifteen of Romans go to the very core of Christian unity in spite of a lack of understanding. Listen to the following admonitions:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. <sup>2</sup> One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (Romans 14:1-2)

Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (14:4)

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (14:5)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

If an individual refuses to practice the spirit of toleration toward the weak, Paul warns the Christians at Rome to keep an eye on the brother who refuses to make allowances for differences (16:17). It is difficult for many Christians to read the Scriptures with correct understanding because of their traditions. The faith of the fathers frequently becomes the watchword of orthodoxy. We must continue to hammer away at the traditions that divide God’s people. Another Christian writer who does not subscribe to the “one faith” as equivalent to the

message of the Gospel is Goebel Music. Music, like so many leaders within the Churches of Christ, applies Ephesians 4:5 to the theological creed of his particular party. He, too, laments that

The great and beloved body of Christ today is being ripped apart by the sawblade of insidious doctrines, one such being that of “Unity in Diversity.” This is one of the most treacherous, double-tongued, underhanded, delusive, guileful, cunning, slippery, intriguing, crooked, questionable, fishy and deceitful doctrines and must be met with a head-on onslaught! It is totally unbiblical, completely sectarian and has nothing at all to do with New Testament Christianity. . . . Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith. Paul, in Ephesians 4, tells us of the “Unity Platform.” Unity in diversity is an insidious doctrine and the answer is simple. The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths! However, it talks repeatedly about THE ONE FAITH! And we are told to believe the same thing so we can speak the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10).<sup>33</sup>

His overall views concerning Ephesians 4:5 are not supported by the context. We cannot question his statement: “Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith.”<sup>34</sup> But the problem with his exposition is that he equates the “unity of faith” with his particular brand of orthodoxy. Again, he is correct when he writes, “The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths!” But what does Music mean by the “diversity of faiths”? He is writing about Christians who use instrumental music, and Christians who advance the biblical concept of “unity in diversity” as holding to another gospel. To strengthen his religious reasoning, he incorrectly applies 1 Corinthians 1:10 to reinforce his misapplication of Ephesians 4:5.

Just a brief reading of First Corinthians, as demonstrated above, reveals his misapplication of 1 Corinthians 1:10.<sup>35</sup> Whatever Paul is saying in this passage cannot possibly be what Music is saying. Otherwise, this passage would contradict Chapters 8 through 13 of 1 Corinthians. The “one faith” is the message of the gospel, not instrumental music, not Sunday school, not grape juice only, not wine only, not Bible colleges, and so on. He identifies the “one faith” with his understanding of the Bible in references to these issues. Focus, once more, on Music as he seeks to elaborate on his concept of the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5:

Anything else is a splattered unity, or perhaps I should say, union. It is a systematized and sectarianized unity for joining the church of your choice and bringing the instrument in the “back door.” There is just one faith, just like there is one Lord. There are no more faiths than there are Lords.<sup>36</sup>

Yet again, we cannot deny his statement: “there is just one faith, just like there is one Lord.” What we do deny, and we must deny, is his equation of the “one faith” with his identifying mark of prevailing attitude—my interpretation and application. In essence, he

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<sup>33</sup>Goebel Music, “The Challenge of ‘Unity in Diversity,’” *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no., 1 (October 1980): 19, 21.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>35</sup>For an analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10, see Chapter 16 (Speak the Same Thing) in this book (Old Texts through New Eyes), 317-331.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

interprets the “one faith” as his understanding of the Bible. When we advance dogmatic theology as the “one faith,” then this belief system opens a Pandora’s Box. This incredible philosophy, advanced by Elkins and Music, has sliced the body of Christ into warring factions that are constantly at each other’s throats. The interpretation that is in vogue among many Churches of Christ and other religious denominations forces the philosophy of “unity-in-conformity,” not “unity-in-diversity.” In fact, most of the party journals within the Churches of Christ belittle “unity-in-diversity” as of the devil.

If we reflect upon the consequences of the outcome of the “one faith” as a compendium of theology, then we must acknowledge that there is something wrong with the traditional interpretation. The “one faith” cannot possibly be a complete system of theology. Christians can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Carl Ketcherside, as cited earlier, correctly says:

The one faith is not a compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. It is not a collection of letters, even though divinely authorized and produced by agency of the Spirit. It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he “was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25).<sup>37</sup>

We observe that Ketcherside defines the “one faith” as Jesus. The traditional interpretation of Ephesians 4:5 fractures the body of Christ rather than unites the body of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ there are as many *faiths* as there are splinter groups if we interpret “one faith” with doctrinal issues. When we interpret “one faith” as *acappella* singing, instrumental music, wine only, grape juice only, one container in the Lord’s Supper, individual cups in the Lord’s Supper, breaking bread, pinching bread, orphan homes, Bible colleges, located preachers, baptisteries, women not cutting their hair, women wearing hats in the assembly, and so on, we create an atmosphere in which division proliferates. Another citation from Garrett is to the point:

This is the nature of faith. It is rooted in a Person, the one who is the bread come down out of heaven. It is not loyalty to any doctrinal system, however praiseworthy be that system. It is a mark of sectarianism to regard faith as assent to a particular set of tenets. Our *faithful* brothers and sisters are all those everywhere who are in Christ Jesus, implicitly trusting in him as the Lord of their lives.<sup>38</sup>

For many Christians the “one faith” amounts to “one opinion.” The “one faith” does not consist of a so-called new law, which is generally interpreted as the New Testament. As a whole, within the Churches of Christ, the “one faith” is boiled down to its lowest common denominator—one opinion. Alexander Campbell, the founder of the denominational Church of Christ<sup>39</sup> also known as the Stone/Campbell Movement, once said with his typical pungency:

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<sup>37</sup>Carl Ketcherside, “The One Faith,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 148.

<sup>38</sup>Leroy Garrett, “The Nature of Faith,” *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 305.

<sup>39</sup>Many Christians in this movement identify the Churches of Christ as having started in AD 33. Those outside this particular body of believers are not Christians. If we wish to understand the true nature of the church, I suggest that everyone read Emil Brunner, *Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

The Apostle says, ‘There is one body, one spirit (sic), one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all.’ **But nowhere is it said in the sacred book, There is one opinion.** If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate (“expound”—RDB).<sup>40</sup>

God has never made faultlessness in knowledge a condition of salvation. If He had, none could be saved. Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and 15 dispel any such belief. This analysis of the subjective (personal faith, which is essential for salvation) and objective (compendium of theology, which is not essential for salvation) faith brings us to the very heart of the “one faith” included in the seven ones, which are essential for Christian unity.

As we study the various factions within the Churches of Christ, we quickly realize that an interpretation of “the faith” depends upon each controversial company of saints. No two parties define “the faith” the same way. Instead of “one faith,” as stated earlier, there are as many faiths as there are splinter groups. Ketcherside has rightly picked up the folly of assigning a meaning to the “one faith” as a compendium of theology:

To postulate that one must have perfect knowledge of every detail of revelation is to require inerrancy and infallibility and to demand that he be God. This is what I call “the Haman’s gallows argument.” If it is affirmed that fellowship with ourselves is contingent upon knowing all we know and understanding everything as we do, then our fellowship with God is dependent upon our knowing all that God knows and understanding everything as He does. Since no one is rash enough to claim this for himself, he admits he is not in fellowship with God, and damns himself by the argument he concocted to deny others. “By what judgment you judge you will be judged.”<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5 is Jesus. This faith proclaims what Jesus has done for humanity. In other words, this “one faith” is the very heart of the Gospel. When one ponders upon this “one faith,” one mulls over the centrality of the cross of Jesus. This “one faith” is about the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ in which He put away the sins of the world. This “one faith” is about the central truth of the Gospel—Jesus who gave Himself for our sins. The “one faith” that Paul addresses in the Ephesian Epistle is the very essence of the Gospel—“who reconciled us to himself through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18). We can only appropriate Christ through faith (personal). We believe that God sent His Son to die for our salvation.

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<sup>40</sup>Alexander Campbell, “To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV,” *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835):111-112.

<sup>41</sup> Carl Ketcherside, “The One Faith,” *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 152.

This faith is something upon which we must agree. This “one faith” must be a belief in the “one Lord.” This is the message that is at the very heart of the “one faith” that Paul emphasizes in the unity section (Ephesians 4:1-6). This “one faith” cuts across all barriers and unites all who put their trust in Jesus for liberation. Again, Paul expresses this “one faith” is the beginning of his first letter to Corinth:

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

How do we appropriate this “one faith”? It is through faith, or trust, in Jesus, not through works. This is the substance of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.<sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “**The righteous will live by faith.**” (Romans 1:16-17)

The Gospel is the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5. This is the one message that Paul carefully and thoughtfully develops in the Book of Romans. The first four chapters of Romans are dedicated to this great theme of justification by faith. For Paul, justification begins and ends with faith. It is all God’s doing. Prior to the coming of Christ, Paul emphasizes that the Jews were under Law, but with the coming of Christ something new came. Paul explains this “one faith” this way:

But now **a righteousness from God, apart from law,** has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.<sup>22</sup> **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference,<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.<sup>25</sup> **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,** through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Paul had just painted a rather dismal picture of humanity under Law. Then he uses two of the greatest words in all of the human language—“**but now**”—to express the “one faith.” The Book of Romans (AD 57) is an excellent commentary on the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5. Take note once more to the words of Paul as he zeros in on the very core of the “one faith”:

“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.<sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” (Romans 10:8-11)

What is the “word of faith” that Paul proclaims? It is (1) “Jesus is Lord” and (2) His Resurrection. We must respond to the message of the Cross (“one faith”) with a vital personal faith (1:16-17; 4:3). How does this living or subjective faith in Jesus come about? This kind of faith is generated through the proclamation of the Gospel: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (10:17). We who hear this announcement **about** Christ and believe will be saved. Listen once more to Paul as he writes: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (10:13). In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul develops the “one faith,” which is God’s method of salvation—Jesus. In speaking of Abraham’s faith, Paul informs his readers that what was said to Abraham was also said for the benefit of everyone who is willing to put his or her trust in Jesus. This concept is fully worked out by Paul:

The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone,<sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.<sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (4:23-25).

The “one faith” that unites is: “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” The “one faith” is an accomplishment of God. Many do not allow the Gospel to be what it is by substituting their own works and their own accomplishments in the hope of eternal life. When we assert justification by works and not by and through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, then we proclaim another Gospel. As we peruse the Book of Galatians (AD 48/49), we also discover that this book too is devoted exclusively to the same theme. Some Judaizers had sought to undermine the “one faith” by denying that justification is by faith in the completed work of Christ upon the Cross.

Thus, he goes right to the core of the problem: “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4). The act that reconciles us to God is not our own act, but rather it is the act of God that brings us together to Himself. Paul, in the Book of Galatians, confronts the issue of justification face-to-face with the adversaries. The question about justification is: is it by works or through faith? He sets forth the dilemma in the beginning of this epistle:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: **If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted,** let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)

If we have not read the Book of Galatians recently, we should reread this book to see what the “one faith” is all about. In Chapter 2, Paul discusses his confrontation with Peter and accuses him and the others of “not acting in line with the **truth of the gospel**” (2:14). After analyzing the problems, he writes down: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (2:21). Over again,

Paul expands his arguments about the makeup of the Gospel. In this enlargement of the Good News, he adds:

Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”<sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.<sup>8</sup> **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham:** “All nations will be blessed through you.”<sup>9</sup> So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:6-9)

Paul says that almost two thousand years earlier that the Gospel was preached to Abraham. The word *Gospel* is frequently identified with one’s brand of theological beliefs, not as Good News about God’s way of justification by grace through faith in Jesus. If we accept the traditional interpretation of Galatians 1:6-9, we wonder if God preached to Abraham the sinfulness of Instrumental music, the sinfulness of individual cups, the sinfulness of Sunday school, the sinfulness of Bible colleges, and so on. Whatever the Gospel is, this Gospel was proclaimed to Abraham. As we continue to read the third chapter of Galatians, we at once see that Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus:

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.<sup>16</sup> The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. (3:15-16)

The “Gospel” and the “one faith” are equivalent terms that describe the same person. This Gospel of justification is equivalent to the “word of faith” that Paul makes known to the Romans (Romans 10:8), which is also equivalent to the “one faith” in Ephesians 4:5. The “word of faith” refers to what he writes in Romans 10:6-11:

**But the righteousness that is by faith says:** “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)<sup>7</sup> “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).<sup>8</sup> But what does it say? **“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:**<sup>9</sup> That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.<sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Paul contrasts the “word of faith” with the works of the Law. The “word of faith” is Jesus. With the heart we believe in Jesus. We who believe in Jesus are justified. This Jesus is the “one faith” that can bring together the people of God. This “word of faith” is not, as stated above, a compendium of theology put forth by various offshoots within the fragmented body of Christ. All over again, one might say that this “one faith” is: “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement” (10:5). This sacrifice of Christ is the very heart of the Gospel. In the Corinthian Epistle, Paul captures the real meaning of the “one faith,” when he pens:

**God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ**, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.<sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

This verse (19) gives the central part of the Gospel—reconciliation with God through Jesus. The KJV renders verse 19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not **imputing** their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” The word *impute* means to put down to someone's account. God, says Paul, has taken our sins and has imputed them to Christ. God has punished our sins in Him: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (5:21). Christ bore the punishment that we deserve. Peter reports the sacrifice of Christ this way: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

God did not stop with imputing our sins to Jesus, but He also imputed (credited) His righteousness to us who put our trust in Jesus for salvation. We can say with great joy: “our **unrighteousness** was put on Him, but, on the other hand, His righteousness was put on us.” Paul elaborates on this kind of righteousness in his discussion of Abraham. He says, “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;<sup>25</sup> Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:24-24, KJV). Paul also cites the words of David (1010-970 BC, reigned), who wrote approximately 1000 years after Abraham, concerning imputation:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it **was counted unto him for righteousness**. <sup>4</sup>Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. <sup>5</sup>But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. **‘Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,** <sup>7</sup>Saying, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup>Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (4:1-8, KJV).

God's method of salvation under the Old Testament was by imputation. In Ephesians, Paul is concerned about the essential principle of unity based upon God's actions in Christ Jesus. Salvation is God's action; it is all of grace; it is all God's doing from first to last. There is only one way of salvation—the way of faith. We can break this unity of faith by bringing in our own works. We can break this unity of faith by insisting that all believers submit to our own unique party of believers. When we break this unity, we deny the centrality of the “one Lord,” namely, Jesus. The “one faith” is not a creedal statement that represents some identifying mark of accepted beliefs that distinguishes one Church of Christ from another Church of Christ. The “one faith” is either Jesus or else Jesus is the object of personal belief. As I bring this chapter to a close, perhaps Paul's words to Timothy in his first and second epistles would be appropriate to conclude this in-depth study:

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must keep hold of the **deep truths of the faith** with a clear conscience. (1 Timothy 3:8-9)

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. <sup>16</sup> Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great**: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (3:14-16).

**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel**, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, **that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory**. (2 Timothy 2:8-10)