

RIDING WITH "THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN"

Victor Knowles

Introduction

I like to call them "the magnificent seven." No, not the seven men who rode as one in the 1960 Western "The Magnificent Seven." I refer to the magnificent seven "ones" of Ephesians 4 – the "Monument Valley" of biblical unity.

"There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6 NIV).

Like a towering pyramid it majestically rises from the heat of the desert floor – The Great Pyramid of the Magnificent Seven. The magnificent, significant seven "ones" of Ephesians 4.

Nowhere in the writings of the apostle Paul is there so powerful an expression of Christian unity. Written nearly 2,000 years ago, "the magnificent seven" still arrest our attention. They stand like sentinels and they stand as one. You would have to be blind not to see them.

Could anything be clearer or more concise? Paul says, "There is." *Is!* Not, wistfully, "There was." Not, wishfully, "There should be." Not "There ought to be." Not "There could be." Not "There might be." But, confidently, "There *is.*"

There *is* one body. There goes denominationalism.

There *is* one Spirit. There go the spirits that are not from God.

There *is* one hope. There go all manmade utopian hopes.

There *is* one Lord. There go all false Messiahs and psuedo-Christ.

There *is* one faith. There goes religious pluralism.

There is one baptism. There go all imitations and substitutes.

There is one God and Father of all. Bye-bye Buddha and all other gods.

If there is more than one body, then there is more than one Spirit, more than one hope, more than one Lord, more than one faith, more than one baptism, more than one God. To deny any of the magnificent seven is to deny them all. More than one Spirit? Confusion! More than one hope? Consternation! More than one Lord? Controversy! More than one faith? Carnage! More than one baptism? Conflict! More than one God? Chaos!

The Greek word for “seven” is *hepta* and corresponds to the Hebrew word *sheba*, which means “to be full or abundant.” It expresses fullness, completeness, perfection. Seven was a sacred number to the Jews. The book of Revelation is replete with sevens: churches, candlesticks, angels, horns, thunders, vials, plagues, crowns, kings, and perhaps more.

Should we be at all surprised to find seven elements of unity in this Pauline passage? I think not. It is no accident or aberration. Paul did not use six expressions of unity; perhaps because six is the number of man – incomplete, imperfect, lacking. He cites seven and verse 3 clearly links them to the creative work of the Spirit. The Christian’s duty is to “*keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” Unity is a product, a gift of the Spirit. Unity is not ours to manufacture; it is ours to maintain.

Using the simple illustration of a four-tiered, seven-block pyramid, let us examine, in reverse order, “the magnificent seven.”

ONE GOD – The elongated base of the pyramid is where it all began. The first book of the Old Testament Scriptures starts with, “*In the beginning God...*” God was, and ought to be, in the beginning of everything: marriage, the home, civil government, the church, education, the arts, you name it. And He is the “*Father of all.*” The last book of the Old Testament Scriptures asks, “*Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another...?*” Why, indeed? For the Father’s family is an interstellar, inclusive family, including those who are already in heaven as well as those who remain faithful on earth (see Eph. 3:14, 15). He is “*above all, and through all, and in all.*”

ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM – Jesus, from His very birth, was Lord of all. The angel told the shepherds, “*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord*” (Luke 2:11). The book of Revelation pictures Him as KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF

LORDS. He is Lord of all races, all cultures, all nations, all tribes, all tongues, all peoples. At the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess *Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:9-11). Eight times in the song “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” do we find the phrase, “And crown him Lord of all.”

There is one faith. That faith is that body of evidence known as “*the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3). It is the Christian faith. We enter a saving relationship with Him, and enjoy a spiritual relationship with each other, through the one baptism (see 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27), Christian baptism.

ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE – Although many spirits and false prophets have gone out into the world, there is only one Spirit – the Holy Spirit of God, the third person of the Godhead, who indwells the believer and who makes us one in Christ. Our one hope is that of being raised from the dead when Jesus comes again. Our hope is stored up for us in heaven (Col. 1:5). It is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27).

ONE BODY – Now look at the capstone of the pyramid – “*one body*.” It looms above like the gleaming tip of an iceberg on the ocean. It unfurls like a flag flown from a mountaintop castle. You would think that “*one body*” would be mentioned last in this list. But, no, it is cited first. Why? Because the church is the body of Christ (see Eph. 1:22, 23). We are the *one body* – the visible body of Christ, His glorious church. But we must be *credible* as well as *visible*. Our unity in Christ (or lack thereof) sends a powerful signal to the world. But what kind of signal are we sending? Yes, we are visible. On some cities there’s a church building on every street corner. But are we credible? Walter Stram said, “Division is treason against Christ, and presents a tragic stumbling block to the non-Christian.” This is why unity is so crucial. This is why Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe” (John 17:21). The world at its worst needs the church at her best. And the church is never better than when she is obedient to the New Commandment: “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:34, 35).

But I would be remiss if I did not point out, as Paul did, that the seven cardinal doctrines of Christian unity are preceded by five cardinal attitudes. These attitudes serve as strong pillars that support Paul’s platform of unity for the church. *Positional truth (doctrine) must be shored up by practical truth (behavior)*. Perhaps more churches divide over bad attitudes than they do faulty doctrine.

We find these necessary attitudes in Ephesians 4:2, 3.

- “*Be completely humble...*” Wayne Smith said, “I’ve never had to apologize for our position, but I’ve often had to apologize for our disposition.”
- “... *and gentle;*” Where are the “gentlemen” in the brotherhood? Paul was gentle, “like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thess. 2:7).
- “*be patient,*” God is called “the God of patience” and we need to emulate Him. All of these are a fruit of the Spirit.
- “*bearing with one another...*” God is also called a God of forbearance (Rom. 2:4). It is putting up with people you’d like to put down.
- “...*in love.*” Homer H. Halley called love “the premier teaching of Christianity, the church’s most effective weapon, the essence of God’s character, and the most powerful force in the universe. Love is the Christian’s “coat of arms” by which others will recognize him or her to be a true follower of Christ.

Conclusion

In the movie “The Magnificent Seven,” the seven brave men rode as one into Mexico to defend a small village that needed their help. Only three rode out. They pause at the graves of their fallen comrades and Yul Brynner says to Steve McQueen, “The old man was right. Only the farmers won. We lost. We always lose.”

But when you are riding with “The Magnificent Seven” of Ephesians 4 we can say, “We win. We always win.” For in Christ we are more than conquerors through Him through him that loved us!

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