

SPIRITUAL UNITY: GOD'S PLAN—PLANK FIVE, ONE FAITH

Paul's letter to the Christians of ancient Ephesus included an outline of God's plan, his divine platform, consisting of seven planks upon which unity in spiritual matters must be based. In previous articles, we have discussed the first four of these divinely specified and provided points, as follows, "There is **one body** and **one Spirit**, just as you were called in **one hope** of your calling; **one Lord...**" (Ephesians 4:4-5a). The next one, plank five, is the fact of **one faith** (4:5b).

By the term faith, Paul did not refer to faith in a subjective sense, that is, what a given individual believes. Rather, he uses the term in an objective sense referring to what God expects every individual to believe in order to serve him acceptably. Note the following passages.

Students of the Bible are aware that prior to his being known as Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, he had been Saul, an avid persecutor of Christians and therefore also of Christ (Acts 9:1-19; 26:1-23). Saul's (Paul's) conversion was amazing to persecuted Christians of Judea as they heard that "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried* to destroy" (Galatians 1:23, emphasis added). But according to Galatians 1:8, 9, what Paul preached he termed the gospel. So, Paul preached the "gospel" also referred to as "the faith."

A second example of the interchangeability of "the gospel" and "the faith" is found in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. He referred to what he preached as "the word of faith," and then called it "the gospel," observing the fact that "they have not all obeyed the gospel" (Romans 10:8, 15, 16.) Thus, one who does obey the gospel of Christ renders obedience to "the word of faith" preached by the apostles of Christ.

This is a vastly different concept than that held by most religious people professing to be Christians. Rampant today is the baseless notion that what one believes is of little consequence as long as one's faith in whatever he has decided to believe is sincere. This "thinking" is utterly ridiculous as witnessed by its result. Has this produced unity, the oneness Jesus prayed for, among people professing to be Christians? No, rather the opposite—multitudes of people believing and teaching a myriad of differing and contradictory doctrines, and hundreds, if not thousands, of churches all claiming to be of the same Christ but as doctrinally divided as the people who populate them.

Is there a solution for this mess? Yes, acceptance of the ONE FAITH God has revealed for everyone in Jesus Christ.

—Jerry F. Bassett