

One Church: One Body

Ephesians 4:1 through Ephesians 4:6 (NKJV)

¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴*There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Series Introduction:

What does God have in store for Greater Friendship? What does God want to accomplish through Greater Friendship? I cannot tell you that I have a vision for us just yet. Right now, I can see that we need to firm up what remains in our ministry efforts and we need to strive to become who God wants us to be. I can't tell you that I know our Vision or Mission at this time, but what I do know this: we won't get there divided.

So over the next seven weeks, we are going to share words with you that are designed to draw all of us in. We want to cross barriers. We want our hearts on one accord. We want to create singleness of purpose and unity of spirit.

We must become One Church in Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 4 Paul tells the believers about seven things that are unique and single in the church. We will examine each one in hopes that they will turn all of our heads in the same direction and cause our eyes to all behold the same glory of God.

Introduction:

Ephesians is a very powerful and enlightening book. Paul is at his theological best as he unfolds the mysteries of the kingdom of God. His doctrine is sound and without reproach. His reach in this book crosses barriers in every direction. His scope spans all of eternity from everlasting to everlasting. In this short book he covers everything from the hidden wisdom of God and the work of grace in salvation, to the origin of the ministry and the tactics of spiritual warfare.

Even with all of these topics, and all of the power and authority that jumps off the pages, Paul still finds time to unify the church with his teaching. He does it by addressing the issues that surrounded the union of Jews and Gentiles in one body in Jesus Christ.

One of the biggest issues Paul faced in his ministry to the Gentiles was explaining how the Jews and Gentiles would co-exist in one church. Up unto this point, Jews and

Gentiles had no dealings with each other. Gentiles could go to worship but they couldn't get in. They had to stand outside in the court of the Gentiles. Between the court of the Gentiles and the Jews was a wall. It had writing on it that let Gentiles know they were taking their own lives into their hands if they crossed the wall.

The Jews were God's chosen people and even after their conversion, many of them believed the new covenant was only for them. They were thinking: We have the covenants and the promises. Jesus was one of us. He has given us a new covenant with our God. How could these Gentiles whom God told us to be separate from now be allowed to come into our worship? How could they be saved and in good standing with God when they don't observe our traditions? How do these people who don't know our God fit in with us if they don't do it our way?

Paul says "There is one body". No matter how you look at it, there is only one body. If we are to become "One Body" in Christ, we must do three things.

1. Acknowledge the Head

Example: Two Headed Snake

How many of you have ever seen, on television or in books, a two headed snake? I read an article recently that explained two headed snakes don't usually live long. Because they have two heads, they face some unique challenges when it comes to survival in the wild.

For example, Two headed snakes have mobility problems. If one head wants to be still while the other head wants to move, they may struggle to get the body to follow. This is extremely dangerous if they were threatened. While they are struggling for control and trying to decide which way to slither, their natural enemies can prey on them.

Two headed snakes also have feeding problems. Feeding may take a long time because they will sometimes fight over which head gets to swallow the food. If one sees food on the left and the other sees food on the right, they may struggle for control of the body while deciding which way to go.

Since snakes operate a good bit by smell, one head may smell food on the other head and try to swallow it. Sometimes, even though they have two heads, both heads may not be connected to the stomach.

I think its safe to say for the two headed snake that two heads are not better than one. In the kingdom it's the same way: two heads are not better than one.

The church is one body and it has one head; his name is Jesus. Jesus **is** the head of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 1:22 through Ephesians 1:23 (NKJV)

²²And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Every believer and church member must acknowledge the head. In order for us to acknowledge the head, we must first recognize the head. We must know his voice so we can hear and obey his commands. We must know his characteristics so we can recognize his face. He has made it simple for us by giving us his word.

John 1:1 through John 1:3 (NKJV)

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

John 1:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Word of God which was fully and completely God, was made flesh and dwelt among us. We know him as Jesus. If we don't know the word, we don't know the head. We get our marching orders from him. We do not allow our habits, traditions, preferences, prejudices, or personalities to dictate to the church.

If the hand believes it is getting its marching orders from the elbow it is sadly mistaken. The signal only travels through the elbow. It comes from the head. That means we must be able to recognize the head. We must know his voice.

We won't know him if we don't know his word. We wouldn't know that Jesus was Lord if we didn't have his word. We wouldn't know that by his stripes we are healed if he didn't say it in the word. We wouldn't know that he took our sins away if we didn't have his word. We wouldn't know that he was the lamb that was slain for us. We wouldn't know that he is the lion of the tribe of Judah. We wouldn't know that he made a way for us to become new creatures. We wouldn't know that his death gives us access to the Father. We wouldn't know that he was the head of the church if it wasn't in his word.

How is it then that we believe we can operate successfully as a church if we don't know the head which is the Word of God? Honestly, if we are making our decisions based on anything other than the word of God, we are working with two heads. If we

make decisions because of tradition and not the word, we are using two heads. If we are making decisions because of personal preferences and not the word of God, we are using two heads. We are connected to Jesus. He is the head and we are the body.

2. Accept One Another

Example: Heart Transplant Rejection

The human body is equipped with an immune system that protects us from things that are potentially harmful like toxins, micro organisms, or even cancer cells. Basically, if our immune systems recognize something foreign has been introduced to our bodies, they attack it.

This is what happens when a person's body rejects a heart transplant. The body identifies the new heart as something foreign and attacks it. So when a person gets a transplant, they have to be monitored closely to see if the body will attack the new heart. If so, they may have to remove the new heart to protect it from damage.

In the body of Christ, Jesus doesn't reject any new body parts. When we get transplanted in or grafted in from our old lives, he doesn't attack us and try to put us out just because we are different. Just like a transplant recipient knows that he needs the new body part to sustain his life, Christ, the head of the church knows he needs the new and different members to work in his body. He doesn't reject people. It's the self proclaimed immune system of members that drive people away.

You see, even in a church our size, we have many different divisions and categories of people. For example, we can be easily divided by age groups. We have at least four generations (1-20, 20-40, 40-60, 60 and up). As a result, if I preach a message that appeals to the 20 to 40 group, the 60 and up group may not accept it as well. If I preach in a style that appeals to the 60 and up group, the 1 to 20 group will want to leave.

So each Sunday, I struggle to connect with all four generations in 30 minutes. What we fail to recognize is our generational differences affect our attitudes towards each other and how we interact with each other. We may not actually attempt to alienate people in the church, but we will think divisive thoughts about them.

We have this same issue with gender in the church. There are men who have an attitude toward women who serve in the church because they think the women are

chasing after the preacher. They believe the pastor is just some spiritual pimp who is taking all of the money and courting all of the women. They won't come to church.

And for all of the women who are frustrated with the men in the church because they are not doing what you think they are supposed to do, I need to tell you we have some good men here. Stop being critical. At least they are here. They are trying just like everybody else.

Divisions come from every direction in the church. People who have been here for a long time have issues with new members who come in the door serving. Our committed people have problems with our less committed. Our traditional members have issues with our new thinkers. Tithers are sometimes critical of non-tithers. Choir members have issues with other choir members. Leaders have issues working with other leaders. News flash, the body is made up of many members but its still ONE BODY.

1 Corinthians 12:20 through 1 Corinthians 12:26 (TLB)

²⁰So he has made many parts, but still there is only one body.

²¹The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²²And some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary. ²³Yes, we are especially glad to have some parts that seem rather odd! And we carefully protect from the eyes of others those parts that should not be seen, ²⁴while of course the parts that may be seen do not require this special care. So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that might otherwise seem less important. ²⁵This makes for happiness among the parts, so that the parts have the same care for each other that they do for themselves. ²⁶If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

In the body, we must learn to accept one another and embrace one another. There are some members in this church who seem to have it all together. We can't be critical of those who don't. Instead, we should be trying to help them get it together. They need special care.

We have some people who are struggling to make it in this world and they need special care. We have some members who are not always out front and need more honor because otherwise they may not get recognized. We have some parts that need to be shielded from the harshness of this world and we must cover them. We have some people who have fallen to sin and fallen in their relationships. We need to encourage them and cover them in love. Love covers a multitude of sins. We have some parents who need help raising and influencing their kids.

We have some seniors who are in need of companionship as their peers fade off the scene. We have some hard working members who need to be refreshed so they can continue to serve. We have some people who have been called a “nobody” who need the revelation that they are “somebody” in Jesus.

The people we think the least of in the church are the ones we need the most. The people we would rather avoid are the people we need to seek out. The people we talk about are the very people we need to be talking to.

We need to look beyond the barriers of age, gender, social status, financial ability, and education level. We need to do our part to accept one another and help one another so there is no schism in the body. There is one body. There is only one Greater Friendship. It is made up of all of us. Greater Friendship is made up of those who came before us and those who are still yet to come. There is one body.

3. Find Our Place in the Body

Ephesians 4:15 through Ephesians 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you are part of the body of Christ. Every member is just as much a member as any other. It doesn't matter if we hold a position right now or whether we have a title. If we are saved, we are part of the body.

The question is; what part are you? What function has God purposed for you? What does God want you to do within the body? How does he plan to use you as part of his plan outside of the body?

When I speak to you about finding your place in the body, I'm not talking about a physical place. Our place in the body is spiritual. We are connected by the love of Christ and the unity of the Holy Spirit. Sure, we share some social commonalities and some personal preferences, but those things are secondary to the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

The arrangement of members is predetermined by God. Our spiritual arrangement is not apparent to the naked eye. We must peer into the spirit to see where God is placing us. He knows how to configure us to get the best results for the edifying of the body.

Even the adding of new members is God's doing. He knows what the body needs and provides for those needs through the membership. When we come to Christ, we bring with us unique experiences that can be applied to ministry.

We bring talents that have been developed in the world that can be used in the body. We bring abilities that can be used to edify the body. We bring skills that God has allowed us to acquire that can be used to build up the body.

For example, yesterday I saw Sis. Wyatt and Sis. Allen using their crafting talents to edify the body and bless the youth. Sis. Gullette and her volunteers shared their skills as health care providers to teach our youth how to be healthy. Our ministry leaders and school teachers used their acquired skills to organize the young people and keep them safe yesterday. DeVonti, Matt, and Corey used their talents with computers and electronics to provide music for the fashion show. Sis. Deborah and the kitchen staff used their talents to feed everyone. Our men shared their strength in setting things up and taking things down. Just their presence had a huge impact on young people who may not have positive male influences in their lives. There are many more examples of people who used their administrative skills, people who shared their gifts of kindness, and those who contributed their time.

We all have something to contribute. Even if all we can do is pick up a piece of paper; as long as it's done for the Lord, it counts. If you can pray, the body can use you. If you can encourage others, the body can use you. If you can give, the body can use you. If you have some time, the body can use you. If you can sweep a floor, the body can use you. If you can fold up a few chairs, the body can use you. If you can sing, the body can use you. If you can stand at a door for a little while, the body can use you. If you can make visitors feel welcomed, the body can use you. If you can visit the sick, the body can use you. If you can tell somebody else what God has done in your life, the body can use you. If you are willing to be inconvenienced, the body can use you.

You will notice that I haven't mentioned the spiritual gifts you have. To be sure that each of us had something to contribute to the body, God has given every believer a gift from the Holy Spirit. The point I wanted to make is God can use anything we are willing to give to help the body.

Conclusion:

As one church, we must be willing to sacrifice for the better good of the entire body. We must support one another and help one another. If we are to be one body, we must agree with God and with our fellow man. We must buy in to the covenant and the ties of love that binds us together.

We must look at the church in a way that is inclusive instead of divisive. These are our deacons. These are our children. These are our choir members. These are our ministers. These are our leaders. These are our elders. These are our brothers and sisters.

There is one church. There is one body. One church must have a singleness of purpose. One body must be united in the spirit. Our thoughts about the church must be brought in line with the word of God. Our attitudes towards the church must agree with the Holy Spirit. When we acknowledge the head, accept one another, and find our place in the body, we will travel to higher heights in the spirit. And one day, we will reach the fullness of the stature of Jesus Christ.