

# **The Church is the Body of Christ**

## **Ephesians 4:1-16**

**Sunday, November 16, 2014**

### **I. Introduction**

Christians live in an interesting tension. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), yet we're supposed to be ideal citizens on earth (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). The kingdom of God has arrived on earth, and Jesus reigns over everything (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23), yet Satan is active and is called the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). We are seated in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6) and we reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4), yet in this world, we can experience rejection, persecution, and hatred.

Theologians often talk of the "already but not yet." The kingdom of God is already here, but not yet fully arrived. We are already new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), yet we still sin and our bodies will fail us. We are already saved, yet the New Testament can also mention salvation in the present (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15) and future tense (Rom. 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Pet. 1:5). In these cases, a reality has already arrived, but we are supposed to grow up into that reality. When we become Christians, we already have access to the fullness of God, but we're supposed to grow in our relationship to him. Likewise, even though the church is a temple of God, in which God's wisdom is displayed, the church is supposed to continue to grow in all kinds of ways.

Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at various passages that reveal the identity and purpose of the church. Today, we'll look at a passage that tells us that we are the body of Christ. As one body, we already experience unity. Yet because we are the body, we will grow up. We are told that though we already have unity, we're supposed to strive for greater unity, greater knowledge of God, and greater maturity. In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul tells us that we're supposed to grow up in this way, and he also tells us how we can grow up to be the mature body of Christ.

### **II. The Unity We Already Have (vv. 1-6)**

In the first section of this passage, Paul tells us that we already experience unity. He begins by reminding his readers that he was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison, most likely in Rome. Paul clearly took his role as an apostle

seriously. He wanted to be worthy of the call that God had placed on his life. Likewise, he urges his readers to do the same. God called them to himself because of his great grace (Eph. 2:8-9). Now it is time that they live as if they were indeed worthy of such a calling. This is like a father telling his child, “You’re a Watson, now live like it.” There’s nothing the child did to become a part of the family, but now that he is part of the family, he’s expected to live in a certain that reflects the family’s values. That’s what it’s like for Christians. There’s nothing we could do to be saved, yet once we’re saved, we are supposed to live in a that is fitting for children of God. At the beginning of chapter 5, Paul says, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.”<sup>1</sup>

In fact, all of what comes in Ephesians 4-6 is built on what Paul tells the Ephesians in the first three chapters. Because they have been saved by God’s grace—something that has nothing to do with how good they are—they are now to live lives worthy of that grace. They have been saved by grace, so there’s no room to boast, but they were created to do the good works that God had planned for them (Eph. 2:8-10).

What does this worthy life look like? It is one that is full of humility, gentleness, patience, and love (v. 2). It’s important to note three things about what Paul is saying in verse 2. One, these traits are ones that Jesus has. Jesus is humble, gentle, patient, and loving. Two, these traits help Christians maintain unity within the church. A church that has these characteristics isn’t very likely to fight and divide over minor issues. The third point is that most of these four traits are found in the fruit of the Spirit passage in Galatians 5:22-23: “<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” It is the Spirit who gives us unity. He is the glue that gives us the “bond of peace” that Paul mentions in verse 3.

Some of us may wonder what the Holy Spirit does. We don’t hear about him as much as we hear about God the Father and Jesus. Well, the Spirit is the one who empowers us to believe in Jesus. That’s why Paul can say, in 1 Corinthians 12:3, that “no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit also causes us to grow in our faith. He produces his fruit within us. But we still have to work at growth, too. In another letter, Philippians, Paul writes: “<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” We are

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the text used herein is the New International Version (1984).

commanded to obey God. We are commanded to “work out” our salvation—to use what God has given us. But the only way we can do that is if God is at work in us, “to will and to act according to his good purpose.” That’s what we find here. Paul tells us that Jesus is the cause of our growth, through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. But we’re supposed to work on keeping the unity God has created in us.

Paul reminds us what the basis of that unity is. In verses 4-7, he mentions “one” seven times:

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all

First, there’s one body. Remember what Paul writes in chapter 2, what we talked about two weeks ago: Jesus has made one new man in his own body (Eph. 2:15-16). There is only one body of believers. In other words, you’re either in Christ, or not. If you’re truly a Christian, you belong to the one body of Christ.

And there’s only one Spirit. He’s the same Spirit at work in you and me, if you’re a Christian today. We were all “baptized” into the same Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” He unites us to Christ and he unites us to each other. He cannot be divided.

There’s one hope. Once, we were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12), but now we have a great hope. The hope of all Christians is the same: we look for the day when we will be with Jesus in a new creation, where there is no more sin and death and all the bad things we experience in this life.

There is one Lord, and that’s Jesus. Whenever we hear “Lord,” we think of Jesus. But in Paul’s day, people would have thought of Caesar, the emperor of the Roman Empire. Augustus, the emperor at the time of Jesus’ birth, was called “God and Lord” and Nero, the emperor at the time of Paul’s writing, was also known as “Lord.”<sup>2</sup> More importantly, “Lord” was how the God of the Old Testament, Yahweh, was referred to in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Paul quotes from that Greek translation, which was called the Septuagint, often. The proper

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington III, “Lord,” ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 484.

name of God in that translation is “Lord,” and it appears over six thousand times.<sup>3</sup> So, Paul is saying that Jesus is truly the God of the Old Testament. He is no less divine than the Father. And he’s the real Lord, the real Master, the real King, not Caesar. He’s the king of all Christians, which is something else that gives them unity.

There’s also one faith that unites us. Paul means the content of our faith, what we believe to be true. He doesn’t spell out all that a Christian must believe in order to be a real believer, but we know we have one authoritative teaching from God, the Bible. We must believe that Jesus is God in the flesh, who came to die in our place, taking the wrath of God that we deserve for our sin, rising from the grave on the third day.

And there’s one baptism. We already read from 1 Corinthians 12:13 that we are all baptized into one Spirit. And we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). We’re not baptized in the name of anyone else but the triune God. Our baptism—both the spiritual baptism that we receive when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and the physical act of baptism—helps unite us.

Finally, there is one God and Father of all. God is the Creator of all things—over Christians, the church, and the whole world. There is one true God, and this is the God of the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

All of this might raise some questions: if we all share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, why are there so many differences among Christians? Why are there so many denominations? Why do Christians disagree about baptism?

Those are good and important questions to ask. The truth is that we haven’t arrived perfectly at this unity that Paul talks about. That is why we must strive for that perfect unity, which will only be achieved when we are with Jesus in the new creation. Now, Christians disagree about some things. There are a number of points I should make about these differences.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>4</sup> We shouldn’t think of God being “through all and in all” in some pantheistic sense. Clinton Arnold explains: “The Jewish philosopher Philo, however, made similar statements about the one true God, referring to him as ‘ruler of all things (πάντων)’ (*Creation* 1.75), near to us in all things (ἐν πᾶσιν; *Migration* 1.56), and penetrating all things (διὰ πάντων διελήλυθεν; *Alleg. Interp.* 3.4), although he never says God is ‘over’ (ἐπὶ) all things.

“Paul has probably coined this expression himself on the basis of general OT teaching about God’s creating the world, exercising kingship over his creation, and filling the world with his presence (see, e.g., Pss 47:8 [46:9]; 103:22 [102:22]; 139:8–10 [138:8–10]; Isa 66:1; Jer 23:24; Zech 14:9). The language of Philo suggests that similar acclamations about God may have been made in the Hellenistic synagogue.” Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 237.

One, some differences are theological in nature are significant and worth dividing over. For example, we are not Catholics because there are some very large disagreements between Catholics and Protestants over how one becomes a Christian, the authority of the church, the afterlife, praying (or not praying) to saints, the identity and role of Mary, and so on. Based on the Bible, we think they are wrong, and these differences are significant and irreconcilable.

There are Christians who identify themselves as evangelical—or at least Protestant—who reject things that I think are very clear in the Bible, because what is clear in the Bible is offensive to their sensibilities, and they think that there must be some other way of understanding what the Bible says. Whether these people, along with Catholics, are truly Christians is something that God determines.

Two, there are some theological differences that are less important. Some Christians disagree about who should be baptized: believers only, or believers and their children? We are Baptists, so believe that only those who have made a credible profession of faith should be baptized. But we should admit that things could be clearer in the Bible, and that so called paedobaptists, those who baptize infants, have a case to be made. Many Christians also disagree about what exactly will happen before Jesus returns, but few denominations have been formed around end times views.

Three, some denominations have formed because of more practical differences, like how the church should be governed. Some Baptist denominations have formed because they had different ideas about missions.

I don't think the existence of many denominations is necessarily a bad or wrong thing. In a world in which there is still sin, even in Christians, there is bound to be some level of disunity. But because truth matters, sometimes it is necessary to break with other people who call themselves Christians but believe different things. In the end, there will be no denominations, only one massive gathering of all the saints around the throne of God.

In the end, what unites us is not our personal preferences, our skin color, our educational backgrounds, the music we like, how we dress, what movies or TV shows we like to watch. What unites is the one God and the one faith we have as Christians.

### III. Jesus' Gifts to the Church (vv. 7-13)

So, one of the ways that keep unity in the church is through exercising those Christ-like character traits of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. Another way is realizing that what unites us is powerful. We have one God and one faith. But there's another way that we maintain unity: Jesus has given the church tremendous gifts which help the church grow up into maturity. Verse 7 says that he has given to each one of us—every Christian—a measure of grace. In other words, Jesus decides what gifts to give what people.

The next bit can be confusing. In verse 8, Paul quotes a verse from Psalm 68. Psalm 68 is about God coming to rescue his people. He is pictured as a warrior who saves his people. When it says, "When he ascended on high," in the Psalm, that is when God came into the temple on Mount Zion. Here Paul, applies that to Jesus. Jesus, when he ascended into heaven, was enthroned the way that God was in the temple. When Paul says Jesus descended, in verse 9, he's talking about when Jesus became man, what we call the incarnation.<sup>5</sup> When Jesus came from heaven, he came to rescue his people. Now, he has set the captives free. He has defeated the power of evil and his ruling over everything.<sup>6</sup> The "captives in his train" (v. 8) may very well be Christians, those whom he has won.<sup>7</sup> And now he gives them to the church.

It's very important to see that Jesus' rule over the universe—his "filling the whole universe"—is related to the officers he gives the church. extends his rule over the world through the church, and he gives gifts to the church to equip the church to grow. Here, Paul mentions four or five different types of people to the church. Verse 11 literally reads: "And he gave the apostles and the prophets and the evangelists and the pastors and teachers." The reason Jesus gave the church these people is to prepare God's people—literally, "the saints"—for works of service. The English Standard Version says "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." Each Christian is a minister, prepared by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to serve

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<sup>5</sup> The descent and ascent are also in view in John 3:13.

<sup>6</sup> On "in order to fill the whole universe" in verse 10: "Christ fills the universe, not in some semi-physical sense, but by his mighty rule over all things (see on 1:22–23), a notion that is paralleled in the Old Testament where filling the universe, in this sense of exercising sovereign rule, is predicated of God: 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the LORD' (Jer. 23:24)" (Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 296-97).

<sup>7</sup> O'Brien says this language is similar to Numbers 8 and 18, "where the Levites are mentioned as being taken by the Lord from among the people of Israel (8:6, 14) since they belong to him in a special way ('the Levites shall be mine', v. 14; cf. 3:45). But having taken them for himself, he then gives them back as gifts to the people so as to serve the congregation. Thus, Numbers 18:6, 'I have *taken* your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel; to you they are *given* as a *gift* for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation'" (Ibid., 292-93).

so that the church is built up, “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13).

The apostles were those sent by the Lord Jesus Christ. Usually, we think of the Twelve plus Paul, though some others, like Barnabas, seem to be called apostles, too. Some people believe there can be apostles today, but only in the broad sense of being “sent” by Jesus to do missionary work, and not having the authority that Paul and the original apostles had.<sup>8</sup> Prophets spoke the revelation they received from God. Sometimes, this involved foretelling events. In Acts (11:29, 21:10-11), a prophet named Agabus foretells a couple of future events. Again, there is an argument over whether prophets exist today. Generally, people agree that even if there are apostles and prophets in some sense today, they don’t possess the authority of those men who wrote the New Testament. Personally, I believe that there aren’t apostles and prophets any more, but that God gave the church his definitive revelation in the Bible, and that’s what Paul is referring to here.

Jesus also gave the church evangelists. In some sense, all of us are supposed to be evangelists. We are all responsible to share the gospel with others in our lives. But some people are specially gifted to be evangelists. Philip is called an evangelist in Acts 21:8. The church desperately needs people who have the gift of evangelism, to proclaim the message of Jesus to those who don’t yet know him.

Jesus also gave the church pastors and teachers. Some people believe this refers to one office: the pastor-teacher. “Pastor” literally means “shepherd.” It’s the same office that is also referred to as “elder” and “overseer” in the New Testament. All elders are supposed to be able to teach. However, it’s also possible that there are teachers who are not pastors. At any rate, being a pastor and a teacher is a gift that comes from God.

For me, this passage is very important. One of my roles is to equip you to do ministry. I think this idea of equipping has been lost in the church. Some people see the pastor as someone who is paid to do all the ministry. He is the minister, the one who provides religious services. Some see the pastor as the CEO of the church, the manager who runs an organization. But a better view of the pastor is a coach, or trainer. More specifically, he’s a player-coach. He does ministry, but he also equips others to do ministry. He is a shepherd, but he’s also a sheep.

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<sup>8</sup> Arnold (259) thinks that church planters could be considered apostles, but they don’t have the authority of the Twelve and Paul.

I got these ideas from a book called *The Trellis and the Vine*.<sup>9</sup> They say that in the first model, the “pastor as clergyman,” the church looks like “a small corner store with one employee.” In the second model, the “pastor as CEO,” the church looks like “a department store with numerous staff.” But in the third model, the “pastor as trainer,” the church looks like “a team with an active captain-coach.”<sup>10</sup>

I say this because I don’t want this church to be “a small corner store with one employee.” God did not intend for the all the ministry of the church to be done by the pastor. I know I *can’t* do all the ministry of the church. But I can help equip you to do the ministry with me. I am a resource for you. I want to help equip you. If you have a question about the Bible, if you want to know more about a certain subject related to theology, if you want a book recommendation—I’m your guy. In the past week, Jay said he wanted to know more about apologetics, so I gave him some lectures on CDs for him to listen to. I would be glad to do the same for anyone here.

We are the body of Christ. That means that everyone person has a role to play. Every member of every local church is a minister. I’ll talk more about this tonight.

Jesus gave the church officers who proclaim and teach the Word of God so that the church could grow. And that in itself is significant: growth comes through God’s Word. That’s why preaching and Bible study are so important. The last few verses show us why the ministry of the Word is so important.

#### **IV. Growing to Maturity (vv. 14-16)**

Paul says the church should grow up into maturity. What is the opposite of not growing up? We find it in verse 14: “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” If we don’t grow up in the unity that comes through the knowledge of God, we’ll be like infants, being tossed here and there by all kinds of false teaching. That’s what Paul is talking about here. When he writes of “the cunning and craftiness of men” he is using words that have described Satan. In Eden, the “serpent was more crafty than

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<sup>9</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 94-101.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 101.



any of the wild animals the LORD God had made (Gen. 3:1). And in 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, Paul writes this:

<sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

<sup>4</sup> For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

There are false teachers today who are “cunning and crafty.” There are people who teach a “Jesus other than the Jesus” we find in the Bible. Often, false teachers say a lot of true things, and they either add to or omit from the whole message of the Bible. These additions and omissions are often very, very subtle. That's why we need to know what the Bible actually says. But too often in the church, people don't read the Bible. One of my goals is to equip you to read the Bible, but I can't read the Bible for you. You have to do that yourselves, or else you will be spiritual infants.

Instead, we're supposed to grow up. We are supposed to “speak the truth in love.” Paul is contrasting this with what the false teachers do. To teach false doctrine is not to love. That's important, because a lot of people today think that insisting that the Bible is true and talking about difficult things like sin isn't very loving. That's far from the truth, however. Truth and love go hand in hand. Jesus was full of “grace and truth” (John 1:14) and we need to be, too. Without love, truth is harsh and cold and legalistic. But without truth, love isn't . . . well, it isn't true love. Love is knowing what is best for someone and trying to give that something to them. Sometimes, the best thing for a person is difficult. It's “tough love,” not reassuring someone in their sin. “Tough love” says, “you need to repent of this sin.” That's what real love does. Real love doesn't say, “You're fine just the way you are.” Real love moves us to become the people God wants us to be. Mature people, not infants.

There is false love, and there's false unity. A false or shallow unity says, “Let's not discuss theology too much, because that's divisive.” But a church without deep theology—without a deep knowledge of God—is a church full of babies. Babies can be united in some things, I suppose, but they don't get much done. I had this image in my head this week: a church of spiritual infants looks like an infant with an adult head. Jesus is our head. In that sense, our head can't get any bigger. But his body—the church—is supposed to grow up to match the head.

If the body remains a child's body, it is odd. It's not fitting. We shouldn't be content to remain children. We should want to grow up in the faith.

When the church is working the way it should, every part contributes to its growth. Paul says in verse 16 that the growth comes from the head of the church, Jesus. But each part must also contribute. Then, the body of Christ will grow in love.

## **V. Conclusion**

I will conclude with some questions, as I often do.

Are we growing in unity? Are we becoming more like Christ? Are we becoming more humble, gentle, patient, and loving?

Do we all consider ourselves ministers? Are we all working to build up the church? All we all striving to know God more, to become more mature?

If you're not ministering in the church, let's talk. We'll find a way for you to become more involved. We can find a way for you to grow.

We are part of the body of Christ. We represent him on earth. We are priests and ministers of the King. Jesus will grow his church, but he has given us a means for growth. He has given the church gifted leaders to prepare you for service. Failure to be equipped—failure to grow—leaves you like a child, vulnerable to false teaching. Will you grow up? Will you contribute to the body of Christ?

Let's pray . . .