

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 7: Unity and the Gifts That Build the Body -- Ephesians 4:1-16

If you have ever watched a great team, you know there is a beauty in it that goes beyond any single player. Each person knows their role, plays their part, covers for one another, and somehow the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Now picture the opposite: a roster of talented individuals who will not pass the ball, who argue over position, who play for themselves. They may have ability, but they will not win, because the thing that makes a team a team is missing. They are not joined together.

Paul has spent three chapters describing the towering grace of God, the riches we have in Christ, the one new humanity made at the cross. Now, with the little word therefore, he turns from what God has done to how we ought to live in response. And the very first thing he calls for is unity. I urge you, he says, to walk worthy of your calling, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Notice that Paul does not ask us to create unity. He says we already have it. There is one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Seven times he says one, hammering the point home. Our unity is not a goal we manufacture by committee; it is a reality God has already established in Christ. Our job is not to invent it but to guard it, to keep from tearing apart what God has joined.

Then Paul shows us how a body so unified actually grows. The risen Christ has given gifts to His people, leaders to equip the saints, so that every member, not just the professionals, does the work of ministry. And as each part does its share, speaking the truth in love, the whole body grows up into Christ, who is the head. This is God's design for His church: not a crowd of spectators watching a few performers, but a living body in which every member matters and the whole grows strong together.

Group Discussion: Paul says the unity of the church is something God has already established, not something we create, and our task is to guard it. How does it change the way we approach disagreements and divisions to realize that unity is a gift to be protected rather than a goal to be manufactured?

Personal Reflection: Paul links unity to humility, gentleness, and patience. Which of these do you find hardest, and how has a lack of it strained your relationships in the church or at home?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Study Questions

1. In verses 1 through 3 Paul urges believers to walk worthy of their calling with all humility, gentleness, and patience, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. What attitudes does Paul say preserve unity, and why might he place these character qualities before any discussion of doctrine?
2. Paul ties unity to humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. Where do you most struggle to bear with others, and how does your pride or impatience threaten the unity around you?
3. In verses 7 through 12 Paul says the ascended Christ gave gifts to His people, including evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry. What does this teach about the purpose of leaders in the church, and what does it say about the role of every member?
4. Paul says the saints, not only the leaders, are to do the work of ministry. Are you living as a worker in the body or as a spectator, and what is one area of ministry where God may be calling you to take part?
5. In verses 14 and 15 Paul says we are to be no longer children, tossed about by every wind of doctrine, but are to speak the truth in love and grow up into Christ. What guards a believer from being blown around by false teaching, and how do truth and love work together?
6. Paul warns against being tossed by every wind of doctrine. Where are you most vulnerable to being swayed, and do you tend to hold truth without love or love without truth?
7. Verse 16 says the whole body grows and builds itself up in love when each part is working properly. What does this teach about how a healthy church actually grows, and who is responsible for that growth?
8. If the body grows as each part does its work, then your participation matters more than you may think. What part has God given you to play, and are you doing your share to build up the body?
9. Verses 4 through 6 declare that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. What is the unity Christ has established, and how do these seven ones, especially one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, confront the denominational divisions and party labels that mark so much of Christianity today?
10. Paul's goal is that we all attain maturity, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Looking back over this whole passage, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one step you can take toward greater maturity and unity in the body.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, one body with many members, each one needed; Romans 12:4-8, differing gifts given by grace to serve the body; Philippians 2:1-4, count others more significant than yourselves; Colossians 2:19, holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body grows; Mark 16:16, whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.