

For the common good

Eph 4:1-6

4 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

There is one body.

/This one body is the church.\

Eph 1:22-23

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

/What does Paul mean by referring to the church as “one body”?\

He is using an analogy.

/He starts with something that we are all familiar with - the human body. \

He says something that is demonstrably true about the human body.

/Then he applies that truth to the church.\

We who are many, are one body in Christ.

/Paul gives his fullest treatment of this analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.\

1 Cor 12:1

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.

/Chapters 12-14 are about one subject: spiritual gifts. \

People in Corinth were abusing spiritual gifts. They took something that was designed to promote unity and turned it into a source of jealousy and rivalry.

So Paul is going to teach them what the spirituals are really for – the common good.

Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 4.

1 Cor 12:4-7

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

/Each of us receives a manifestation of the Spirit – better known as a spiritual gift.\

Varieties, and yet the same.

/Here the unity is expressed by the word “same”. \

The same Spirit. The same Lord (Jesus Christ). The same God (the Father).

The same Spirit distributes the many varieties of gifts. The same Lord calls believers to a variety of ministries. The same Father is working all things in all persons.

This is sublime! Once again we see the activity of all three members of the Trinity.

/Paul uses the analogy of the body to support his teaching on spiritual gifts.\

1 Cor 12:12-13

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

/The human body is one organism.\

This is demonstrably true. Everybody who has eyes has seen a human body and can verify this. For example, you have one body. You don't have two.

/Yet my human body has many members.\ I have two feet and two arms. The body has two eyes, two ears. Ten toes. And so forth.

And yet all of the members of the human body are one body.

/The body is not a bunch of unrelated parts.\

They weren't created separately and then stuck together.

They are one organism. One life. This is fairly obvious.

1 Cor 12:12

*12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, **so also is Christ.***

/Now Paul uses this analogy to explain the body of Christ – a spiritual body.\

We can't see the spiritual body. But it shares things in common with the human body that we can see. As the human body, so also the body of Christ.

/There one body of Christ. There is only one.\ The body of Christ is one spiritual organism. It lives across time and space. We are in the same body as the first century martyrs. We are in the same body as the persecuted church in Asia.

/Since Jesus ascended into heaven, every believer has been a member of the one body of Christ.\

This body has many members! Yet we who are many are one body in Christ.

/We are all indwelt by the one Spirit.\

/We all share one hope – the resurrection of our bodies to eternal life at the Lord's appearing in glory. We share one inheritance.\

/We all have one Lord. \

/We all share one faith – the gospel.\

/ We share one baptism – the baptism by the Spirit into Christ.\

We are all one in Christ. / We have the same Father. \We are brothers and sisters.

This is all God's work. His work is perfect. It was nothing that we did.

In the church, there is no Jew or Greek. There is no rich or poor. No male or female.

Gal 3:26-28

26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We have many different ethnicities – but we are one body in Christ.

We come from many different backgrounds – but we are one body in Christ.

Some of us are rich, while others are poor – but we are one body in Christ.

1 Co 12:13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

There is one Spirit.

/The Holy Spirit baptizes each believer into Christ. He places us into Christ permanently. He identifies us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.\

Rich and poor, old and young, we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Out of the many, the Spirit makes one.

/Paul talks about the unity of the body of Christ in Romans 12, in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4. In each place, he also teaches about the spiritual gifts.\

This is no accident. Jesus prayed to His Father that believers may be perfected in unity. The Lord provides spiritual gifts in order to preserve the unity of the body.

/If you are a believer in Christ, you have been given a spiritual gift. Why?\

1 Cor 12:7

7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

/The Lord gave you a spiritual gift to serve the common good.\

He wants you to use that gift to meet the needs of the saints in the congregation.

We have received a special gift – a manifestation of the Spirit in fact - for one purpose - to serve one another.

1 Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Jesus prayed to His Father that we may be perfected in unity. When we use our gifts to serve one another, we contribute to this work.

So – each of us has received a special gift. Each of us ought to use it to serve one another. We need each and every gift to be functioning.

/Let's face it: there is room for improvement here.\

There are needs that are not being addressed as they ought to be.

Are we acting as members one of another? Or are we acting as individuals, for our own self-interest? Are we only here so we can have our own needs met?

Are there times when you ignore the needs of others? Are there times when you are indifferent to the suffering of others?

/1 Cor 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. \

These are serious questions. We need to be honest with ourselves.

1 Peter 4:10-11

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Whoever speaks. Whoever serves.

/So whatever gift you have, it's either a speaking gift or a serving gift.\
And we need them all to be functioning.

Let's next head to the book of Romans chapter 12 verses 4-8,

Rom 12:4-8

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; 7 if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

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OK so there you have it. Paul lists seven gifts here. /Three are speaking gifts:

Prophecy (Preaching). Teaching. Exhortation.\

/Four are serving gifts: Service. Giving, Leadership. Showing mercy .\

Many gifts – one body. Many gifts, one purpose.

And that purpose, recall? For the common good. To meet the needs of the saints.
To serve one another.

From time to time we need to give ourselves a reality check.

I'll leave you with one challenge today. It's in the area of service.

/Service. This is taking the initiative and responsibility to meet a need in the congregation on an ongoing basis.\

Here's a test: we all see things that we wish were handled better or handled at all!
But we need people who rather than judge instead say, I'll take care of that!

Perhaps next time that person will be you.

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You know the 80/20 rule? 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people.

News flash – That's NOT God's design for the congregation! It's more like 400/100.

BTW How did I get the 400? If 80% of the work is getting done with 20% of the members, then if all 100% did the work we could get 5 times as much done!

OK I think that's enough of a grilling for one session!

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Paul started with the unity of the body.

Next, he'll describe its diversity. We'll see this next Sunday starting in verse 14.

Let's pick things up now in verse 14.

1 Cor 12:14-26

For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

The body has many members. And they display remarkable variety.

At first glance, a thumb appears to have nothing in common with an eye. One is at the end of an arm. The other is in the center of the head.

One has a mechanical function. It has two joints. It works together with the other fingers.

The other gives sight to the body. It is intricate yet delicate.

Paul does something very interesting here. He personifies the body parts. He lets them speak.

This tells us that he is not simply talking about body parts after all. He's talking about people! Later on, in verses 25 and 26, he will say that the members have the same care for one another, and that they rejoice.

Here he has woven together the human body and the body of Christ. We are to understand what he says about the human body also applies to the body of Christ

Next week we will learn more about the body of Christ, starting in verse 18.

18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be

weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

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/Out of the many, one.\

E pluribus unum. (Marcus Tullius Cicero, 44 BC. “When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many”)

And He places us in the body just as He wills.

With that, let's now head to Ephesians 4.

That's impossible:

Only the Lord has the blueprint! Our unity is supernatural!

When we examine the epistles, here's what we find:

/We are not called to create the unity of the Body of Christ, the church. But we ARE called to PRESERVE the unity of the body.\

Here is where our decisions and actions matter.

We are called to take actions to nurture the unity, guard the unity.

We are also warned not to do anything that could disrupt or undermine that unity.

/This morning, we are going to examine what the epistles have to say about what the Lord has done to establish our unity.\

Later on, we will learn how to preserve that unity. The epistles address both the positive and the negative commands that the Lord has given the church.

So we pick things up today in the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 1.

Eph 4:1-3

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with

patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Notice in verse 3 that we are instructed to be diligent to preserve the unity. You can only preserve something that has already been created and established.

/Who established it? Verse 3 tells us: the Spirit. It's His unity.\

Let's take a look at the nature of this unity that God the Holy Spirit created for us.

/In verses 4-6, Paul identifies the seven essential elements of this unity. \

Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul's description highlights the supernatural character of our unity.

A brief scan of these seven elements reveals that this unity is supernatural in character.

/In fact, three of the seven elements are the three persons of the Godhead!!\

Read verses 4-6 again. One Spirit. One Lord. One Father.

/Then there are two elements that are linked with the Spirit. They are the one body, and the one hope of our calling.\

/Finally, two elements are linked with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.\

Now at this point you might find it odd that no other elements are linked with the Father. But there is a good reason for this.

/The Father is over all. He is sovereign over all things. \
He sent Jesus. Jesus submitted to the will of the Father.
/In this way, the Father is over the Lord Jesus Christ.\

And one day, after the Father has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet, the Son will be subjected to the Father – the One who subjected all things to Him. *1 Cor 15:22-28*

/The Father is also over the Holy Spirit\ . The Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ on a mission to redeem lost sinners. And then the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Spirit with the mission to establish the body of Christ.

/The Father is also through all. He operates through the Spirit who carries out His will on earth.\

/The Father is also in all. He is in Christ, and Christ is in us. \

Eph 1:22-23

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

Let's continue with the two elements of our unity that are associated with the Spirit.

One body:

/The one body is the body of Christ. \

Rom 12:4-5

4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

/We saw in Ephesians 1:23 that the church is His body.\

/That unity of the one body is forged by baptism – the baptism by the Spirit. Each and every believer in Christ is baptized – placed into and permanently identified with – into Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.\ Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

1 Cor 12:12-13

12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

/We have all been baptized into the one body of Christ – the church.\

I hope you are starting to see the tremendous interlinking between these different elements of our unity. For example, there is one body. It is the body of Christ. That body is formed by the baptism of the Spirit. We'll see more of this as we go along.

One hope of our calling:

/The one hope of our calling is the resurrection of the body to life eternal when Christ appears for us. This is the hope of our inheritance laid up in heaven for us. \

As we close, let me show this to you in the epistles:

We begin in chapter 1 of Ephesians.

Eph 1:18

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Of course it's no accident that we find Paul introducing these subjects - the body of Christ and the hope of our calling, in the first chapter of the book of Ephesians.

Rom 8:23-25

23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

/Paul speaks of our hope, and identifies it as our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.\

1 Thess 4:13-18

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Unlike the unbeliever, we have great hope.

/ At the coming of the Lord, when He descends from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ shall rise. This is the resurrection of the body. \

Then we who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

/Our bodies will be transformed into bodies like His.\

John speaks of this hope too, in his first epistle:

1 John 3:1-3

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Thus we end today where we began, with the writings of John.

Next Sunday, we will examine the two elements of our unity which Paul associates here with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.

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/The nature of our union with Christ is that of mutual indwelling, John 17:21-23.\

We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

/We are in Christ:\

1 Cor 1:30-31

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

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Gal 3:27-28

*27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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/And Christ is in us:\

Col 1:25-27

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

/And, as we saw in John 17:21-23, the purpose of this unity is to reveal the glory of Christ and the love of God to the world.\

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The church has a mission. It's given a calling and a purpose by God. The mission reflects that calling, that purpose. How do we fulfill our mission?

/We fulfill our mission being perfected in unity. This is our **corporate witness** to this lost and dying world. We are one body in Christ.\

/Glory is the demonstration of who God is. We reveal to the world what God is like by preserving the unity that He has established for us.\

The world will see our unity and know that God sent Jesus. They will observe our love for one another, and can learn about the love of God for them.

This is exactly what we find in Paul's admonition to the church in Rome:

Rom 15:5-9

5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,

*"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,
AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."*

That leads to the next question, which is this:

/How do we preserve the unity of the body of Christ? Negatively, what things disrupt or undermine the unity of the brethren?\

Today I will sketch this out in broad terms. The epistles go into great detail.

/We begin with the negative. The deeds of the flesh create discord in the body.\

In Paul's day, the church at Corinth was nearly destroyed by this.

1 Cor 1:10-12

10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I

mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

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And again:

1 Cor 3:2-4

2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it.

Indeed, even now you are not yet able,

3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?

Now for the positive.

/First, this unity is preserved by being of one mind , holding to the “one faith” – the word of God, the mind of Christ.\

Phil 1:27

27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

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/Second, the exercise of spiritual gifts strengthens the unity of the body.\

1 Cor 12:4-7

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

All the three members of Trinity contribute to the fruitful exercise of our gifts.

/Third, the lifeblood, the bond of our unity is the love of God, John 17:23.\

Col 3:12-14

12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

/Fourth, the Lord's Supper is designed to express the unity of the body.\
Let's get ready now to celebrate the Lord's Supper.