

LIVING TOGETHER Sunday School- December 16, 2012

Unifying Topic: UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Lesson Text

I. The Basis For Unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

II. The Preservation of Unity (Ephesians 4:7-16)

The Main Thought: There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism. (Ephesians 4:4-5, KJV).

Unifying Principle: We all feel positive about life when everything goes well after we have worked together on a project. What brings about this feeling of unity? The writer of Ephesians says that, although each of us brings different gifts, we find true unity as we grow into Christ, who is the Head of the whole body.

Lesson Aim: To help the learners understand what establishes and sustains the unity within the body of Christ.

Life Aim: To help learners recognize their gifts that have been to them to help build up the body of Christ.

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- 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
4:8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
4:9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
4:10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)
4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

HISTORY:

Ephesians Chapter 3: ¹In this chapter Paul reminds his readers of God's grace that has been shown him regarding the revelation of the "mystery". By reading what he had written earlier, they would understand how the "mystery" pertained to Gentiles becoming fellow heirs in Christ, and Paul felt privileged to preach among the Gentiles what for ages had been hidden. Knowing that what he did was part of God's eternal purpose in Christ to make His manifold wisdom known by the church, he asked his brethren not to be discouraged by any tribulations he experienced on their behalf (1-13).

The chapter also contains Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians. He prays for their enablement, that the Father would strengthen them by His Spirit; that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith, that they be able to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, and so be filled with all the fullness of God. He concludes his prayer and this chapter by ascribing that glory be given to God in the church by Jesus Christ for all eternity (14-21).

LESSON:

Ephesians 4:1-6 The Basis For Unity

4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,— "Therefore" is in view of grace revealed, new life imparted, and our high and heavenly calling. Paul relates that he was "the prisoner of the Lord." He was not seeking sympathy, but declaring his acceptance of his circumstances. He was a prisoner because of his relationship to Christ, his faithfulness to Christ, and his service for Christ. He is writing from prison because of his service to Christ and to Christians like the Ephesians. By mentioning

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/ep/ep_03.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

his imprisonment, Paul gently remind Ephesian believers that the faithful Christian walk can be costly and that he had paid a considerable personal price because of his obedience to the Lord. Since Paul was willing to suffer for the welfare of others, he had more authority to ask the Ephesians to do the same in their relationships with each other. "Walk worthy" indicates the "life and conduct; the idea of living to match one's position in Christ." "Of the vocation ye are called" means a "calling or life's work." Therefore, our conduct should match our life's work Christ has called us to. The wonderful gospel invitation calls for a new, transformed life which is God's sovereign call to salvation.

4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;— We are to walk worthy with the proper attitude.

- *The believer must walk with all lowliness (humility):* This means putting Christ first, others second, and self last. Christ does not want us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to or even less highly than we ought to. Your high calling should not lead to pride or self-exaltation, but on the contrary to all "lowliness" of mind and modest opinion of self.
- *The believer must walk with all meekness (gentleness):* It is the spirit that never takes offense and which manifests itself in submission to God's will and gentleness toward men. It is not timidity, cowardice, or servile fear, but self-suppression for the purpose of serving others.
- *The believer must walk with longsuffering* which is the opposite of short-tempered. The old nature is so quick to take offense that we need longer fuses. However, the new life of Christ enables one to endure with unruffled temper any wrong suffered without retaliation and to turn the other cheek.
- *The believer must walk forbearing one another in love.* This is that mutual and enduring putting up with one another and making allowances for one another in love; restraint under annoyance with allowance for the faults and failures of others in love. Love beareth all things and endureth all things.

4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. "Endeavouring" means to give diligence to do your best in persistent effort; fixed determination; you are going out of our way to make this unity work. The unity of the Spirit, here, comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, not believers, bestowed oneness of all true believers creating the bond of peace. The purpose of walking worthy is onefold. Believers are to work at keeping the peace so that they can stay bound together in the unity of God's Spirit. Only by the Spirit can we put to death the deeds of the sinful nature and become peacemakers. The purpose for walking worthy is to keep the unity (oneness) of the Spirit in the bond (union) of peace.

4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;— Keeping the unity of the Spirit is the bond of peace causes a position of oneness in Christ. The seven basis for unity are:

1. **Only one body**—God is only creating only one body of people who trust and follow His dear Son. God does six things to the believer that places him into the body of Christ:
 1. God gives a new birth to the believer—quickens him spiritually—causes him to be born again.
 2. God makes a new creature, a new man out of the believer
 3. God places His divine nature into the believer
 4. God puts His Holy Spirit into the believer, actually and the believer's body becomes a temple for the presence of God's Spirit
 5. God causes the believer to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit
 6. God places the believer into the new body of people He is creating, that is, into the body of Christ, His church.

All Christians are members of the church, the body of Christ. Though Christians are scattered in various places with some not knowing others, together they make up the one body, the invisible church (invisible to us but visible to God).

2. **Only one Spirit**— The same Spirit that dwells within one member of the body dwells in all members of the body.
 - It is God's Spirit that causes a man to be born again.
 - It is God's Spirit that calls and gifts and directs each member to fit in and work within the body.

Each member is to do his part in carrying out the mission of the body— for Christ. Acting independent of the body is of another spirit, for there is only One Spirit creating the one body of Christ.

- One Spirit produces Christ's character in us (Gal.5:22-23).
- One Spirit seals God's ownership in us (Eph.1:13-14).

- One Spirit is to dwell in our temple in which He takes up residence (1Cor.3:16).
 - Because of the One Spirit in us we will be raised from the dead to live again (Rom.8:11).
3. **Only one hope**— Christians do not have separate "hopes", but are together called to eternal life and to enjoy God forever in resurrection glory. ²This hope is fitted to promote union. There is no rivalry--for there is enough for all. All may obtain that crown; all may share those rewards by believing and accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior.

4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

4. **Only one Lord**— All Christians submit to Jesus Christ as Lord. There is no better way of promoting unity among Christians than by reminding them that they have the same Savior. We accept His authority over everything in our lives.
- To live as He said; holy and righteous and pure, bearing the fruit of His Spirit (Gal.5:19-21).
 - To carry out His orders as one body
5. **Only one faith**— Christians should be united because they hold the same great doctrines; and, also, because they have the same confidence in the Redeemer in their hearts.
6. **Only one baptism**— There is one baptism, the baptism of the Spirit into Christ's body. Baptism emphasizes the unity of Christian believers because they are baptized into one body, through one Spirit, by one faith, in the one Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism does not guarantee this unity, but baptism signifies this unity in the one Lord. That is why Paul exhorted the Ephesians to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (v.3). If we do not keep the unity of the Spirit with our fellow believers in the body of Christ, we are contradicting what we confessed in our baptism. When people trust Christ as their Savior, God pours His Spirit into their hearts. The Spirit incorporates us into the common life of the Christian community.

4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7. **Only one God and Father**— The heavenly Father is one God and Father for all, not a separate god for each nation. He is over all—this shows his overruling care (transcendence—*to go beyond a limit*). He is in all—this shows His active presence in the world and in the lives of believers (immanence—*describes God as existing in and extending into all parts of the created universe*). This is not as in the natural family where one may have many fathers, but in the spiritual family there is only one Father over the family of God. We are children in the same family, loving and serving the same Father who teaches us to walk in unity.

Ephesians 4:7-16 The Preservation of Unity

4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. The word "but" is strong. The believers are not only in unity, there is diversity. There are differences between gifts, special abilities given by God which are to be used to strengthen believers and reach the world and minister to it. Every believer is gifted. A spiritual gift does not mean the natural ability or talent of a person. Jesus Christ gives us the grace to use our gifts. Grace means the strength, wisdom, courage, motivation, love, concern, care, and power—all the favor and blessings of Christ. Whatever is needed to use the gift, Christ gives us. He measures out the exact amount of grace needed for the maximum use of a gift. The Lord decides what measure of the gift or ability or ministry each of us is to receive. Though we are one body and we are one with each other in Christ, our individual gifts are not the same.

4:8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

It's loosely quoted from Ps.68:18, referring to God coming to occupy His temple. Paul refers it to Christ when He ascended to heaven, He led captivity captive, obtained certain gifts for men, and that those gifts are bestowed upon His people. In order for him to do this He would have had to descend into the lower part of the earth (Hades; Hell—the *place of departed spirits or the abode of the dead*) before he could ascend. The point is that Jesus Christ had to die. This is the enormous price our gifts cost. If He had not died, then we could not be saved or gifted with spiritual gifts. He not only subdues His enemy, but he leads His captives in triumph. The allusion is to the public triumphs celebrated among the Romans, in which captives were led in chains. When Christ ascended to heaven, He triumphed over all His foes. But He did more. He rescued those who were the captives of Satan, and led them in triumph. The ascended Lord did not forget the Old Testament saints. They were only detained until the Lord's

² <http://www.studylight.org/com/bnn/view.cgi?book=eph&chapter=004>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

coming. He sent the Spirit with gifts to equip His church for ministry. Jesus is the one who came from heaven to earth, ascended back to heaven with the resurrection victory, capturing all evil power, and then sending the Spirit back to earth.

4:9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

Well did I get ahead of myself in the above verse? However, it therefore concludes that there had to be a descent; a place that he does not want us to go. He has taken our place so we wouldn't have to. He came not only to the earth, but he stooped to the most humblest condition of humanity here. This implies another lowest state of humiliation, other than the cross. It cost us nothing but it cost Him everything.

4:10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)—

It's no doubt about it, this is Jesus Christ who now has accomplished what He came to do. Before ascension Jesus had to first complete His work on earth. 1Jh.3:8 says, "*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*" By doing this, His plan and purpose would be to fill all with His presence and His Spirit, from the very lowest to the very highest, but first He had to descend into the lower parts of the earth before He could ascend up far above the heavens which completed His work. He now has return from whence He came.

4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;— Christ gave gifts to men and He gave gifted men to the church, in which and through which they function. Men cannot work up the gifts, nor give the gifts to other men. Christ alone possesses the spiritual gifts to give to men, whereby the Spirit teaches us to use them. Five gifts are mentioned here.

1. **The gift of the apostle.** The word "*apostle*" (*apostolos*) means to send out. An apostle is a representative, an ambassador, a person who is sent out and commissioned by the one he belongs to as his representative. One of the requirements for being an apostle was that they had to have personally seen Jesus. An ambassador does not bring his own message, but brings the message of the One who sent him. These men helped to lay the foundation of the church—apostles and prophets (Eph.2:20).
 - a. The narrow sense refers to the twelve apostles and to Paul. They were given 3 basic responsibilities.
 - i. To lay the foundation of the church (Eph.2:20).
 - ii. To receive, declare, and write God's Word (Acts 11:28; 21:10, 11).
 - iii. To give confirmation of that Word through signs, wonders, and miracles (2Cor.12:12; Acts 8:6, 7; Heb.2:3, 4).
 - b. The broad sense refers to other men who preached the gospel out of honor of their important work or because they were sent out by a local church on a mission. They are called "*apostles of the churches*" (2Cor.8:23) rather than "*apostles of Jesus Christ*" like the 12+1 (the 13).
 - i. Two missionaries: Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14, 17) and Silas (1Th.2:6).
 - ii. Two messengers: Titus (2Cor.8:23) and Epaphroditus (Phil.2:25).
 - iii. There is also a possibility that James, the Lord's brother (Gal.1:19) and Andronicus and Junia (a woman) (Rom.16:7) are referred to as apostles. Of course in a broad sense, all Christians have an apostolic ministry.
2. **The gift of the prophet.** This is the gift of speaking under the inspiration of God's Spirit. These men were foretellers and forthtellers. They received their message from God and delivered it for God to man. They had deep insight into spiritual truths as they interpreted God's message under the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. **The gift of evangelist.** This is the gift of carrying the gospel all over the world. It is the gift that specializes in proclaiming the gospel to the lost, who had not heard it, as well as forming congregations of new converts and setting them in order, building them up in the teaching of Christ. Men like Timothy and Titus, and Philip were evangelists. It appears that evangelists received their ministry through ordination by the elders of the church. The apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church and the evangelists built on it by winning the lost to Christ. The fact that a believer may not possess this gift does not excuse him from being burdened for lost souls or witnessing to them.
4. **The gift of the pastor.** The word means shepherd. The pastor is an under-shepherd to the Chief Shepherd, Christ Jesus our Lord. The shepherd...
 - a. knows the sheep; knows each by name.
 - e. protects the sheep, even sacrifices his life for the sheep.

- b. feeds the sheep.
- c. guides the sheep.
- d. seeks and saves the sheep who are lost.
- f. restores the sheep that go astray and return.
- g. rewards the sheep for obedience and faithfulness.
- h. shall keep the sheep separate from the goats.

Elder is another name for pastor. In the New Testament times each congregation was led and cared for by a group of elders (presbyters) also referred to as overseers (bishops) or pastors (shepherds). A.T. Robertson points out that the Lord Jesus told Peter to shepherd His sheep (Jh.21:16), that Peter told other ministers to shepherd the flock of God (1Pt.5:2) and that Paul told the elders (ministers) of Ephesus to shepherd the church of God for which Christ had died (Acts 20:28) (*Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol.4, p.53*).

5. **The gift of the teacher.** Some commentators consider teaching to be part of the gift of the pastor, that is, the pastor is the pastor-teacher. The function of the teacher is the gift to instruct believers in the truth of God and His Word. It is the gift to root and ground people in doctrine, reproof, correction, and righteousness. Teaching is a high calling, ranked second only to the spiritual gifts of apostle and prophet (Acts 13:1; 1Cor.12:28; Eph.4:11). Every apostle and prophet and pastor should have the gift of teaching, but every teacher is not an apostle or prophet or pastor. The spiritual gift of teaching is the gift of understanding and communicating the Word of God, of edifying believers in the truths of God's Word. As a gift, it becomes a passion of a teacher to break down the Word of God to others.

4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:—

Every believer's gift has a threefold purpose. The five gifts described above are gifts that involve speech and proclamation. There is an immediate purpose for the office-bearing gifts in the church and among God's people. Three purposes here:

1. For the perfecting of the saints—³helping the saints to higher and holier lives.
2. For the work of the ministry— carrying on the various works assigned to the ministry.
3. For the edifying of the body of Christ— all were intended to minister to the up-building of the church, within and without.

Officially appointed leaders in the church were never intended by Christ to do all the ministry. Their job is to equip all the members of the flock to serve and bear fruit according to their various gifts. Many churches produce little fruit because they do not understand this. D. L. Moody said, "*It is better to put ten men to work than to do the work of ten men.*" This is how we are to prepare God's people to do His work. The saints have to be perfected to do the work of the ministry. They have to be built up into one body in Christ. The body of Christ has to be enlightened for ministry.

4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:—

This is in reference to the whole body of Christ. The goal is not uniformity (*consistency or evenness*), but that we attain unity (*oneness; harmony*) in the faith. There is also an eternal (meaning *never-ending*) purpose for the office-bearing gifts in the church and among God's people.

1. The minister of God works to *bring about a perfect unity* among God's people.
 - a. Forever bring peace and reconciliation to the church.
 - b. Forever lead people into perfect harmony and oneness of spirit.
 - c. Forever shepherd people out of cliques, divisiveness, murmuring, grumbling, griping, and etc. that has influence against a perfect unity.
2. The minister of God works to *bring about the knowledge of the Son of God*. Paul speaks of true, accurate, and full knowledge which enables saints to cooperate with one another in working out God's plan and purpose.
3. The minister of God works to *bring about a perfect man (a complete man; grown up)*, a man *who measures up to the fullness of the stature of Christ Himself*. We are imperfect outside of Christ but perfect in Christ. The "*stature*" refers to the growth of a man. This fullness is imparted by Christ and God has predestined His saints to be conformed to the image of His Son. As we decrease, He increases to perfect man into the measure of growth of the fullness of Christ. The stature to attain is that of Christ. He is the standard—not in size, not in age, but in moral character. The measure to be reached is in Christ. We are to grow till we become like Him.

³ <http://bible.cc/ephesians/4-12.htm>

4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;— Immature, unstable Christians are vulnerable to false ideas which distort their witness and stop the growth of Christ in their lives. God desires that we be sturdy and strong Christians with doctrinal stability, spiritual perception, responsibility, and direction toward the goal. Too many are content to remain in weakness and immaturity, spiritual infancy. It's not time for milk but for meat. We are not to be cast about as driftwood on the waves of the sea. This is the picture of instability, helplessness, and restlessness; being whirled around in circles by every shifting wind of false doctrine. If not anchored in Christ, Christians are at the mercy of these ever-changing winds which blow unstable souls in every direction by the deceit and dishonesty of the religious quacks. They can use cunning craftiness, unscrupulous, scheming frauds, and will stop at nothing until they snare fickle souls by their clever deceit and treacherous trickery. By deliberate planning and scheming, they twist and pervert the Word of God. The Christians only hope is to search the scriptures daily to find the truth with the Spirit's help.

4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:— The truth should always be spoken in love without any tricks or gimmicks. The false teachers only love themselves. Christ's ministers are to teach truth because they love the believers. If not spoken in love, we close minds and undo the very good we are trying to do. And our ministry becomes destructive instead of building up. Speaking the truth in love grows us up in all things in Him, Christ, who is the head.

4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Christ is the source and sustainer of the body. The body becomes harmoniously and closely fitted together with no one out of place, and with each one contributing his share for the good of the whole body. "*Compacted*" means firm and solid adhesion to Christ and other Christians. When all the members of the body perform their numerous functions faithfully, it results in the growth and maturity of the whole body. The church is a living organism united to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit so that every member helps and is helped. Every member and every gift is important. The church cannot reach its full potential without them all functioning together. The result will be a unified and edified church in love.

SUMMARY:

⁴Beginning with this chapter and proceeding through the rest of the epistle, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. Having described earlier how Jesus attained unity between Jew and Gentile through His death on the cross, Paul now pleads with them to "walk in unity". With humility, gentleness, longsuffering, forbearance and love, they should be diligent to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The unity of the Spirit is then defined as consisting of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God (1-6).

Perhaps as motivation, Paul reminds them of the gracious gifts Christ gave His church following His ascension to heaven. Such gifts included the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, which are designed to equip the saints for ministry and bring the body of Christ to maturity. In this way, it should not be misled by false doctrine, but instead by speaking the truth in love and growing in Christ as each member does its share (7-16).

APPLICATION:

The basis for unity is a oneness in the body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father. To preserve this unity is by His grace. Through that grace, God has placed gifts in us to help us and keep us living harmoniously in love with the knowledge of the Son of God perfecting us to full measure. He alone can help perfect us! The person that we should really know is Jesus Christ, the Son of God thereby getting to know others.

⁴ http://executableoutlines.com/ep/ep_04.htm

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>