

"TEACHING THE BODY OF CHRIST"
The Biblical Teaching About The Body
Of Christ Based On Ephesians 4

by
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The Parable Of The Unwise Supervisor

(The Apocryphal Book of John.....The Covach)

Chapter 1:1-19

¹There was once a rich man who planned to go on a long journey. He summoned his dedicated supervisor and informed him that he had entrusted his property to three servants. ²To one he gave ten talents, to another five talents, and to another three talents, each according to his ability. ³The supervisor was to help each servant to invest his talents well. Then the rich man went on his journey. ⁴The man with ten talents immediately came to the supervisor for help in using his trust wisely. ⁵But the supervisor was concerned that if a man with ten talents used his trust very well, then before long he would no longer be able to control that servant's dealings. (Runaway train syndrome) ⁶So in fear, the supervisor only attempted to use seven of the man's ten talents. ⁷The servant gained seven more talents from what was invested, but three talents were buried because of the fear of the supervisor. ⁸So also, the one with five talents came to his supervisor for direction. ⁹Here was a man the supervisor worked with well. Three of his talents quickly gained three more. ¹⁰But because the supervisor had never thought of developing some kind of useful program in which the other talents could be used, two of that man's talents were buried because of a lack of an organized program. ¹¹Finally the third servant brought his three talents to the supervisor. ¹²Because a man who has only three talents is obviously blessed with less ability than the one with ten talents and the one with five talents, the supervisor spent little time trying to make the most of the one with fewer skills. ¹³He was considerate to that servant, but, in unwarranted pity, gave that man little to do lest he be overwhelmed. ¹⁴Because of the supervisor's attitude, the man used one talent and gained one talent but went and buried the rest. (Why beat your head against the wall-type logic) ¹⁵One day, by surprise, the rich man returned from his trip and asked his household to make an account for their activities. ¹⁶Each of the servants were found to have not used their gifts to the best of their ability, and so they were held personally responsible for their mismanagement. ¹⁷However, it was also discovered that the supervisor, although he had been faithful to a degree, had not done his assigned task well. ¹⁸The rich man also had to reprimand him for being very unwise. ¹⁹But the rich man was gracious and forgave his repentant household; for the rich man's only son willingly suffered punishment for their wrongs and pleaded the cases of those who trusted in him.

This parable may seem like a funny introduction for a paper entitled, "Teaching the Body of Christ." But as we explore the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, the connection

between my little parable and the subject at hand should become more evident. The Apostle Paul will be reminding us that, as God's called workers, we should not only teach the doctrine of the spiritual body of Christ but also, by grace, help equip the members of that body for Christian service.

It should be noted from the start that this paper will only be an explanation of the Biblical truths taught in Ephesians 4:1-16. It is not intended to be a thorough exegesis of these verses, but it will hopefully give you enough background to this section of Scripture so that you will be able to readily apply its principles to your ministry. My co-worker and brother in Christ, Mr. David Jacobs, will be helping you make that application in a second paper this afternoon.

Right now, give your attention to the Biblical teaching about the body of Christ. Using the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians as our study guide, we will see:

- I. The Unifying Characteristics Of Christ's Spiritual Body (Verses 1-6)
- II. The Diversity Of Gifts Given To Christ's Spiritual Body (Verses 7-10)
- III. The Instruments Of God Used To Equip Christ's Spiritual Body (Verses 11+12)
- IV. The Desired Growth Of Christ's Spiritual Body (Verses 13-16)

I.

The Unifying Characteristics Of Christ's Spiritual Body

Ephesians 4:1-6 (N.I.V.)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely

humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ²Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope when you were called-⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

As the Apostle Paul wrote this letter, he was "a prisoner for the Lord." (4:1) He had been faithful to his calling and had been boldly giving witness to his Savior in spite of opposition. This had resulted in his imprisonment. Ephesians is one of four letters (Philemon, Colossians, Philippians) which was written while Paul was in captivity. Where this imprisonment took place is a matter of debate for commentators. Some say Caesarea. Other's say Ephesus. Still others insist on Rome.

More important to us than the "where" of Paul's imprisonment is the "why". He had been faithful to his Lord Jesus; that was why he was in chains. With this thought in the mind of his readers, Paul now encourages them to also be faithful to their Savior. They are "to live a life worthy of the calling they have received" (4:1)

In the first Chapters of this book, true Christians are reminded that they have a high calling. We hear that before the creation of the world, we were chosen to be God's people. The Lord predestined us to be his adopted sons through Christ Jesus. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (1:7). By grace we were given the free gift of faith (2:8), and as examples of God's workmanship, we were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (2:10) Why, by grace we were made "fellow citizens with God's people", "members of God's household", and living bricks in His "holy temple". (2:19-21) In

view of God's mercy then, a life of living gratitude should flow from a Christian.

In this chapter of Ephesians, Paul is specifically interested in one aspect of the Christian's life. Believers are to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (4:3) The Holy Spirit has united Christians in a special way, and so, by his direction, they are to strive to maintain that unity. All whom the Spirit has touched enjoy peace between themselves and their God, peace through faith in Christ Jesus. This spiritual peace binds Christians together and motivates believers to be humble, gentle, patient, and willing to bear with one another in love. (4:2) God desires unity for his children and not division.

Ideally speaking, Christians should be at peace with one another, for God has united all true believers into one large church: the Una Sancta. Paul gives us the unifying characteristics of this group in the next three verses. It is described as being "one body".

The picture of all of God's Children making up one body is used elsewhere in Scripture. In the ^{back} of Romans Paul writes, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Romans 12:4+5) About the same thought is expressed in I Corinthians 12:14-ff. The point of this passage is that it takes many parts to make up a human body (eyes, ears, feet, hands, etc.) ,but all are joined just in the right way to form one body. So in Christ, all true believers, regardless of race,

sex, nationality, age, intelligence, or social status, are joined into one body. The church is called the body of Christ.(1:22+23)

Now those who are a part of this body also have "one Spirit", the Holy Spirit. When you consider that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3), you can understand our common bond in Him. We confess in the Small Catechism, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." All members of Christ's body have one Spirit, for He must renew, sanctify, and govern, all those in the church.

Through faith, the Holy Ghost also gives the members of Christ's body one hope. This is a living hope that can never perish, spoil, or fade (I Peter 1:3+4). Through Christ we are promised heaven and an inheritance of everlasting life. This is the church's common hope: the church's sure hope.

In Ephesians 4:5, we learn that the body of Christ has "one Lord", "one faith", and "one baptism". The one Lord of the church is our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins so that we could be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. Scripture calls Christ the "head" of the body of all true believers.(5:23, Colossians 1:18)

Because the church is Christ's, we give it the name "Christian" and recognize Jesus as the only object of saving

faith. For as Scripture says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Or again, we learn that we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24) This means that salvation can only be given to those who are members of Christ's body. The Christian Church is the only saving church.

It can be called the "holy" church for several reasons. First of all, it is the blood of our "one Lord" that purifies us from the guilt and power of sin (I John 1:7). So in God's eyes, for Jesus' sake, we are holy. But because of our connection with Christ, the True and Living Vine (John 15:5), the church is also holy because it is given the power to serve God with works that He even calls good and holy. (2:10, Romans 12:1) Christ is our "one Lord".

When Paul mentions that we have "one faith", two things come to mind. The Apostle must be referring to the personal, heartfelt trust that a true believer has in the Savior, but he might also be making reference to the one body of doctrine that Christians call their faith. If Paul is referring to the personal faith a person has in Christ as the Redeemer, we know that that must be true of all those who are a part of the body. Only true believers can be counted in this special group. For it is only through faith in Jesus that we become a member of God's family, the church. (Galatians 3:26)

As we think about the personal faith in Christ that belongs to each child of God we are also reminded that the spiritual body of Christ is invisible. Just as it is impossible for a

person to see saving faith in a man's heart, so the holy Christian Church is also invisible to us. The Lord knows those who are his (II Timothy 2:19) and the individual Christian knows himself to be a believer (II Timothy 1:12), but, on this sinful earth, we will not be able to positively identify all who belong to Christ's body. This means we cannot associate the body of Christ with any visible church. Its members will be all true believers from various Christian denominations. So the Good Shepherd tells us that he has sheep in different sheep pens but they all belong to one flock (John 10:16).

The invisible body of Christ is also the catholic, or universal, body of believers. It embraces all true Christians that ever lived, are now living, and will live to the end of days. Anyone who personally has the "one faith" in Jesus is part of this body. The true Christian Church had its beginning with Adam and Eve, who trusted in the promised Seed of the woman; it includes all the believers of the Old Testament (Acts 10:43; Romans 4), and all the believers to the end of time (John 17:20). They have "one faith" in the "one Lord".

If we understand "one faith" to refer to the body of doctrine we believe, then we are reminded that the Church is Apostolic. It is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone" (2:20). The doctrine of the Bible is the body of doctrine which true Christians believe. Real unity is only possible when the members of Christ's body, "devote themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42) as the early Christian church did. Unity at the expense of God^{is}-inspired Word is not unity at all. It is a smoke screen for compromise and false doctrine. God's family

is to remain true to the Scriptures and avoid errorists (Romans 16:17). They share "one faith".

"One baptism" is also a unifying characteristic of Christ's body. Those who cling in faith to the Savior are all baptized with the baptism he instituted. Through that baptism they are "clothed with Christ" (Galatians 3:27), cleansed "by the washing with water through the word" (5:26), given the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), and made heirs of salvation (I Peter 3:21)..

"You are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus". (Galatians 3:26) As members of Christ's body, we have a unique relationship with God. We can approach him as dear children approach their dear father. Through faith the "one" true God became "the Father of all" true believers. We are made part of his family. Paul emphasizes the unique unity we have with our God when he points to the Father as the one "who is over all and through all and in all" (4:6). His parental authority and protecting power is over us; His mercies are seen through us and He carries out various aspects of His kingdom work through us; He lives in us (2:22, I Corinthians 6:19). Our "one God and Father" is another evidence of the unity of the body of Christ. All the "ones" mentioned in these verses emphasize the point, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male nor female, for you (true believers) are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

II.

The Diversity Of Gifts Given

To

The Spiritual Body Of Christ

Ephesians 4:7-10 (N.I.V.)

7But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8This is why it^b says:

"When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men."^c

9(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

As was mentioned, the holy Christian Church is united. All true believers are members of Christ's body. But now Paul also tells us that there is a diversity of gifts that have been given to the various members of the Una Sancta. Such diversity does not destroy unity; instead it promotes it as long the following are true:

1. The recipient must recognize his endowments as a gift, and not as the product of his own skill or ingenuity.
2. The recipient must view his talent as one of many gifts given by Christ to the Church.
3. The recipient should use his gift for the benefit of the body (Roman 12:5), and to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31)

If these guidelines are followed, then the true believer who is very talented will not over estimate his worth and become proud, while, on the other hand, the child of God who is less endowed will not become discouraged and think he is of no benefit to the church.

Paul tells us that Christ gives "grace" to each member of his body in an apportioned amount that he determines. Obviously we are not talking about "saving grace" in this context. Each of us needs a limitless amount of that type of grace, for we each start in the same spiritual darkness and depravity (2:3+5) and can only be saved by God's totally undeserved love(2:8+9). Paul is speaking of something quite different here. He is

referring to gifts or endowments of grace which give each Christian unique talents and skills.

Surely Christ has the power to give such gifts of grace to each of the members of his body. After the mystery of the incarnation, Christ, according to his human nature, was given "all things" by the Father (Matthew 11:27, Luke 10:22, John 3:35, John 13:3). The throne of David, all power, authority, wisdom and glory were given to Jesus (Luke 1:32, John 17:8, 22, 24, Matthew 28:18). He has storehouses of gifts to give his disciples.

To verify this fact, Paul alludes to an Old Testament prophecy recorded in Psalm 68:18. Christ is pictured as a victorious conqueror who ascends to his kingdom loaded with the spoils of those he has overcome. The members of Christ's body are freely given a portion of the loot. Jesus has gifts to give! For the same Savior who on this lowly earth has completed the plan of salvation in his state of humiliation, has now been exalted and has ascended to his throne to distribute his gifts to his subjects. He has supremacy over all.

Now notice that Christ gives some gifts to each of his true believers. Every member of Christ's body has some talent to be used for service in the kingdom. But this does not mean that every true believer is blessed with the same gifts. Christ is not only the source of these blessings but also the distributor of them. He has a variety of talents to give us through the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:7-11, Romans 12:6-8) but ~~alots us skills~~ ^{which} as He determines in His wisdom (Matthew 25:14-ff).