

LESSON THREE

THE BODY: Unity and Diversity in the Church

"There is one body...But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph 4:4, 7).

DAY 1: READ & SUMMARIZE

The following verses encapsulate the lesson to follow. Read them carefully, meditating on their message. Express the key concept of each passage as it applies to unity and diversity in the Church.

A) John 17:20,21 –

B) Psalm 133:1,3 –

C) 1 John 4:12 –

DAY 2: LEARN & RESPOND

INTRODUCTION

The body, one of the most graphic and helpful portraits of the Church used in the New Testament, is applied both to the universal Church and to local assemblies. This first part of the study will focus on Ephesians 4 and the gifts given for the Church at large to see its growth beyond the limits of existing local churches. This is often a neglected aspect of the vision the Lord had for His people. We know He expected individual believers to reproduce, having children in the faith, as Paul called them. But the Lord also wanted churches to reproduce and especially gifted certain men to be used in accomplish-

ing this. These gifted men are introduced to us in Ephesians chapter 4.

THE DIFFERENCES IN THE LISTS OF GIFTS

There are four key passages when we consider gifts in the New Testament: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 (along with chs 13-14), Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. In this lesson, we will be turning most of our attention to Ephesians 4. Here the risen Christ shares the spoils of His victory by giving special gifts to the Church. But notice the differences between this passage and the other lists of gifts given in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12:

	ROM. 12 / 1 COR. 12	EPH. 4
The GIVER	The Holy Spirit	Christ
The GIFT	supernatural abilities	gifted men
BENEFICIARIES	your local church	the Church at large

**THE HEAD-BODY
RELATIONSHIP AND
MEMBER-TO-MEMBER
RELATIONSHIPS**

1. The relationship between the body and the Head. There is one passage dealing with Christ's headship relative to church government (1 Cor 11:3); and one verse stating Him to be the capstone or "head of the corner" of the spiritual temple being constructed of "living stones" (1 Pet 2:7). But apart from these, there are six key references to Christ's headship relative to the body, three in each of the Ephesian and Colossian epistles:

- Eph 1:22, which declares His **supremacy**, the place God gave Him due to His victory over death (Heb 2)
- Eph 4:15, which explains His **sustenance** of the body—*"from whom the whole body" is supplied* (v 16)
- Eph 5:23, using the husband-wife relationship, shows

us the importance of **submission** to the head

- Col 1:18 concludes a section showing the **sufficiency** of our head: Redeemer, Revealer, Creator, Sustainer
- Col 2:10, it's the **singularity** of our head (2 are not better than 1): *"He is the fullness... Ye are complete in Him"*
- Col 2:19, again the **simplicity** of "holding" to this one head; don't be beguiled (v. 18; see also 2 Cor 11:3)

Believers who want to meet as New Testament churches will "hold the head." But practically how do we do that? First, we cannot expect to acknowledge Christ's headship together if we do not acknowledge His Lordship personally. Submission by a local church to Christ begins with the individuals yielding personally to Him day by day. Some may ask, How does the Lord communicate His desires to the

local church? The Lord has no communications problem, does He? By His Spirit, He makes His will unmistakably clear, for those who “*will do His will*” (Jn 7:17) shall know if the matter is of God or not. We see this kind of direction throughout the book of Acts. He uses His Word (Acts 11:16), His Spirit (Acts 16:6), a sense of peace in the heart (Col 3:15), prayer and fasting (Acts 13:2), other godly believers (Acts 11:28), and circumstances. We should be quick to pray, ready to search the Scriptures, and willing to do whatever the Lord shows us He wants. And of course ready to repent when we find ourselves on the wrong path.

Elders are the ones most responsible for knowing the Lord’s will for the church. They are not selected because they are clever but because they are spiritual. They are not a decision-making body but a discerning body, not to make up their own minds but to discern the mind of the Lord

in the matter. We need to earnestly and regularly pray for them.

2. The systems in place in the body. Much like the skeletal, nervous, and respiratory systems—whose benefits are shared by all parts of the body—there is common life shared in the churches through prayer, fellowship, encouragement, worship, teaching, and the ministry of the Spirit. These are not for only some; all may enjoy them fully.

3. The particular organs of the body. If the “systems” in place stimulate unity, the particular gift given to each individual reveals the diversity of the body, and therefore the inter-dependence needed—since you have spiritual abilities which I need (and do not have) while the opposite is also true. We need each other; the Lord has designed it this way on purpose. “*But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*” (1 Cor 12:7, NKJV).

How important is unity to the heart of Christ? to the success of the Great Plan?

In John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed, *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me”* (vv 20-21). Earlier He had told the disciples: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (13:34-35). Could He have stated it any more strongly?

- If we visibly and practically show our love to one another, then, and only then, will the world take us seriously.
- If we visibly and practically show unity with each other,

then the world will take the claims of Christ seriously.

How lightly we often take this two-fold charge! Dear brothers and sisters—are the offenses we cause and take worth such horrendous collateral damage? Shall we allow such offenses, hurts, tension, and ill will to continue even one more day? Can you take responsibility for the continuation of the offense though you may not be guilty of causing it? Eating humble pie can taste quite good, especially if we keep in mind the massive implications and waves of blessing that could ensue if we buried grudges and refused to recall them again (see Appendix 8). *“How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...there the Lord commanded the blessing”* (Ps 133:1, 3). If there is an obvious lack of blessing, we may not have far to look for the reason. The Lord tells us, *“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them”*

(Mt 18:20). This is often applied to regular church meetings, but the primary interpretation has to do with Christians meeting to seek reconciliation. The Lord is saying, “I’m all for that. I’ll be there, ready to help.” There are challenges, of course, but we who love Him should be able to unite around Christ and against our common foe. Blessed (though often bloodied) are the peacemakers.

A CLOSER LOOK AT UNITY IN EPHESIANS 4:1-6

1. What is the “therefore” there for? The Ephesian letter has been climbing up to one of the highest mountain peaks anywhere in Scripture. In chapter 1, Paul has told us of the plan in the heart of the Godhead and the particular ways in which each Member of the Godhead has contributed to that plan: the Father (vv 3-6a); the Son (vv 6b-13a); and the Spirit (vv 13b-14). Each section ends with a glorious call “to the praise of His glory” (vv 6, 12, 14).

In chapter 2, he explains the extent of the damages to the whole human race which needed repair (vv 1-3) and the special problem of the Gentiles who were “*without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). What a bleak prospect! But through Christ we have been not only reconciled to God; we have been united with believing Jews in the Church.

This is the reason Paul was a prisoner (4:1). He writes in 3:1, “*a prisoner for you Gentiles.*” This fired the animosity of the Jewish leaders against Paul—preaching “the revelation of the mystery” (see Lesson 1). Paul wanted the Gentiles to appreciate what it had cost their Jewish brothers for preaching this universal gospel. We should as well.

As Paul comes to the pinnacle at the end of chapter 3, he concludes: “*Unto Him be glory in the*

church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (v 21). And how is the glory of God revealed in the Church? The previous paragraphs tell us: THE WISDOM OF GOD is revealed in the Church (v 10), as is the POWER OF THE in-working SPIRIT (v 16), as well as THE LOVE OF CHRIST (v 19). Now Paul begins our section with a "therefore" that calls us all, in the light of such a vast plan, to accomplish our part—"the vocation to which we are called"—by first getting along with one another. If we are going to exercise our giftedness in co-operation with others, there will need to be some lubrication to keep the expected friction from building. What are the graces provided for this?

- **lowliness:** to follow the example of Christ who "*humbled Himself,*" willing to take the low place to save your soul! Are we willing to take such a place, to do whatever it takes, to fulfill our calling?
- **meekness:** a mildness and gentleness of spirit that belies the influence I could use to get my way; strength in control. The Lord invites us into His school to learn meekness and lowliness from Him (Mt 11:28-29).
- **longsuffering:** steadfastness in times of difficulty, long-tempered: "that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate; the opposite of anger, associated with mercy" (W. E. Vine).
- **forbearance:** to hold up, to hold one's self erect while under a load, to sustain, to bear, to endure, not to let go one's end of the load even under difficult circumstances. To be the kind of person one can count on at all times.
- **love:** agape, selfless love that does not think of itself, seeking the highest good for others. Supernatural evi-

dence that we are saved: "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us" (1 Jn 4:12).

TWO KINDS OF UNITY

1. Unity of the Spirit. *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (4:3). In this God-provided organic unity, all true believers are one—no ecumenical compromise needed! God's people are one and it is our responsibility to "keep" it.

—*one BODY*: we have the unity of a common life, provided through Christ's mighty sacrifice.

—*one SPIRIT*: we have the unity of a common Teacher, Guide, and Provider.

—*one HOPE*: the unity of a common objective; we long to be with Christ and like Christ.

—*one LORD*: we have the unity of command from one Captain, *"and all ye are brethren"* (Mt 23:8).

—*one FAITH*: a common body of truth, *"the faith...once delivered to the saints"* (Jude 1:3).

—*one BAPTISM*: a common Church history! We all look back (or should) to the same historic event.

—*one GOD AND FATHER OF ALL*: He is the Father of all, above all, through all and in us all.

2. Unity of the Faith. *"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 fullness of Christ"* (v 13). This is not an historic fact but a promise that will come true through a process. And that process is outlined in vv 11-12. The resurrected and soon-to-be exalted Christ gave gifted men to the Church (Ephesians primarily has the whole Church in view). These gifted men were to continue the chain reaction begun by Christ equipping them. Their ministry

was “for the perfecting of the saints” so the saints could do “the work of the ministry” and the end result would be “the edifying of the [whole] body of Christ.”

THE FIVE SPECIAL KINDS OF GIFTED MEN

The APOSTLES and PROPHETS had ministries that were obviously not only to one particular local church. What did they do? And do we still have apostles and prophets today?

- **apostles:** the word is an anglicized form of the Greek, meaning a messenger, one who is sent at another’s behest. Peter explains that such apostles, along with obvious spiritual qualifications, must be trained personally by Christ and were witnesses to His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22). Paul was especially qualified, though “*born out of due time*” (1 Cor 15:8) because he was a witness to the resurrected Jesus, and was personally trained by the Lord (Gal

1:11-12). Of course the word can be applied in a wider sense (as it is to Timothy, Barnabas and Silas) when we speak about missionaries, or those sent on a mission. But that is not the way in which Paul was using the word in the epistle to the Ephesians. These men, he says, had a foundational work to do (Eph 2:20). Once a foundation is laid, it is time to build the superstructure upon it. The only apostolic succession Paul knew about is found in Acts 20:29!

- **prophets:** from two words meaning “to speak before,” it was used of holy men raised up by God both to foretell and to tell forth His thoughts. Again it can be used sometimes of any servant of God who speaks His Word, especially those who speak to present needs. However once again in this epistle it is used of the foundational gift given to those who completed the canon of Scripture, as Peter would write: “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will*

of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet 1:21). Peter goes on to explain, "*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you...*" (2 Pet 2:1). Notice the change. While the Scriptures were being written—while there were true prophets—there were also false prophets to beware. Now the danger is of false teachers; every prophet (in this sense) would be false since the Bible is a completed work.

However, note the following: while we no longer have these two kinds of gifted men working among us, we still have their ministry—apostolic authority and prophetic revelation—captured for us in the Word of God, which is able to prepare us all "for every good work." Indeed it is, for everyone who wants their church life based only on the teaching of God's Word, lest we fall into the trap of which our Lord spoke: "*Making the word of*

God of none effect through your tradition" (Mk 7:13). Of course He was not condemning our doing things not specified in Scripture (times of our gatherings, etc.) in a sensible, Christ-honoring way. What He was condemning was the teaching of traditions as if they were the commandments of God. Woe betide those who put a heavier obligation on the Lord's people than He does!

- **evangelists:** again an English form of the Greek, for "a bringer of good news." While local churches have also been equipped with gifted evangelists, these special gifts from Christ have a broader task. Not only are they to spread the gospel, they are also to equip the saints so they can also evangelize. How important this is! As well, these evangelists break new ground for the good seed, "*to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand*"

(2 Cor 10:16). We must remember to pray for and financially support such pioneers, *“Because that for His name’s sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles”* (3 Jn 1:7).

• **pastors:** this is simply the word for shepherds, and again the elders of the local churches are also shepherds. But these pastors, men like Timothy and Titus, worked alongside the evangelists and stayed afterward to help the fledgling believers. Their role (described in detail in the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) was to prepare these new Christians for their life and ministry, to see the new church functioning properly, and as soon as possible to point out the elders that God had raised up in their midst. They would then move on to work with other new groups of believers to do the same work there. Today, unfortunately, because the elders in some places feel unable or ill equipped, they ask for a man with pastoral gift to head up the

shepherding work—or do it all. This is a redundant arrangement, duplicating the work and robbing this man from a work he should be doing among new Christians. It also robs the believers of all having a vital part in the work of God.

There is another problem. Because some of these evangelists “go into all the churches to preach the gospel” instead of going into all the world to do it, there are few new gatherings of believers for these pastors to help in this way.

• **teachers:** those with the special ability to clearly explain the Word of God. In the case of these teachers (as opposed to those given for one locale), their ability also includes the training of the local teachers and every student of the Word. Apollos was just such a man. His gift was not to replace those who ministered the Word locally but to encourage them in becoming better and more useful teachers of the Word. This is very needed

today: men who can help to improve the calibre of public ministry and teach the people of God to effectively study the Word themselves.

QUESTIONS

FOR DISCUSSION...

1. What are the struggles of maintaining diversity and unity in a local church and how does Scripture help us with these?
2. What are some of the benefits of diversity and unity in the church, and how can we emphasize these over the struggles?

Review:

1. In the notes the question was raised, "How do we practically do that (hold the head)?" (Col 2:19). What was the answer?

2. What did you learn about the role of elders and our responsibility to them?

3. If there is an obvious lack of blessing among us, where might the problem lie? Is there a situation you are aware of to which this truth needs to be applied?

4. The unity to which we are called will involve friction. But graces have been provided to lubricate our relationships. Which grace or graces do you most need to develop? How will you actively seek to do this?

5. What does the role of pastor entail?

DAY 3: WATCH & ANSWER

Fill in the blanks as you watch the video. TIP: It's helpful to pre-read the questions before watching. You can check the answers in the Answer Key (Appendix 10).

Introduction: "It should shock us that the Lord Jesus would choose so a word picture as that of the ."

1. The Differences in the Lists of Gifts:

a) In Romans and Corinthians, the gifts are

In Ephesians, the gifts are

b) In Romans and Corinthians, the gifts are given .

In Ephesians, the gifts are to help the church .

2. The Head/Body Relationship:

a) The elders of the local church are not a body, but a body. They are there to discern God's will for the church.

b) The organs of the body are designed to what they receive. And they get it back in a form they .

c) You don't get joy by it but by it.

d) Tongues as used today is not a gift if it benefits only .

3. How important is Unity to Christ?

a) These three have been committed to us: the of God, the , and the so that in the way we live our lives before people, they will be .

b) Our mission in the world is to give people about God that they might think of God because of the way we live in the world.

4. A Closer look:

Whatever you do, don't with the .

5. Two Kinds of Unity:

The unity of the faith is not an historic fact but a process.

6. Five Special Kinds of Gifted Men:

a) To be an apostle, a man had to be by Christ, and be a to the resurrection of Christ.

b) The role of pastor, evangelist and teacher is not to do all the work themselves, but to the saints so they can do the work.

Conclusion: Remember, when you are touching the , you are touching the .

DAY 4: WRITE & REMEMBER

1. Record three significant statements from this chapter. Why are they significant to you?

A) **Statement One:** _____

B) **Statement Two:** _____

C) **Statement Three:** _____

2. Memorize **Ephesians 4:4, 7**.

DAY 5: REFLECT & PRAY

Respond in prayer: Having looked carefully at the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ (the Church)—reflect on your own life in the following ways:

Praise: _____

Repent: _____

Ask: _____

Yield: _____

PRAISE: What specific blessing have you discovered in this lesson? Thank the Lord for it! **REPENT:** Is there something in your life that is hindering you from experiencing what you have just learned? **ASK:** What specific way would you like the Lord to help you live out these truths? **YIELD:** Is there a particular area in your life that needs to come under the Lord's rule?