

# The Church is One Body

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're continuing our series on the church this fall with this passage from Ephesians 4. And as we go into it, I am thinking about this time change that we have just gone through.

And I notice we're still going through because the clock up there says it's 20 after 12, which means I'm done. So is the whole service. And I was thinking as I was coming here, what would it be like if I just kept on daylight saving time this week?

What would your life be like if you stayed on that schedule in defiance of everything the world is doing? Your life would be very much changed, I think, this week.

But one of the things that would happen is you'd miss lots of meetings. Your one-on-one appointments, big gatherings like this, you'd just be coming in. You'd be just leaving just now from this service just as everybody's getting here.

You'd miss out on a lot of these gatherings. And you'd be completely out of sync. You'd find your life out of sync with everything that is going on around you.

[ 1 : 07 ] And it would be a strange, strange thing to be doing. Well, this reading today talks about the unity that God gives.

And if we are out of step with this unity, it's like we've never changed our clocks. We've never changed them according to what God's timetable is, according to what His work is, according to what His movement is in the world.

We would be out of step with what He is doing if we don't understand what He is doing with unity in our church. And this Bible reading really helps us to get into step with what God is doing.

Helps us to be on His agenda and about His schedule for the world. And so it's very helpful for us to be looking at this. What starts, the context of this, because we're jumping into the middle of Ephesians, is that the first three chapters of Ephesians, we've heard about grace, grace, grace in the most marvelous ways.

We've heard about how Jesus has adopted us from the beginning of time. He's chosen us to receive every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. And what He has done is He's taken us from the place of spiritual death to the place of being made alive together in Christ.

[ 2 : 29 ] He has given us every spiritual blessing. That's what those chapters tell us. And now, in chapter 4, Paul, in a sense, says, Do you believe this?

Well, belief in the Bible is all about acting on what you know to be true. And Paul, in a sense, in these next three chapters in Ephesians, 4, 5, and 6, is saying, Do you believe this?

How are you going to walk as a result of what you know about Jesus Christ, as a result of what you believe? And that's why in chapters 4 through 6, you hear a lot about walking.

And look at verse 1. You say, And so, you know, if you jump down to 4, 17, we're going to hear Paul say, Don't walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

Walk in holiness. And he spells that out. And then in chapter 5, verse 2, he says, Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. And then in verse 8, he says, Walk as children of the light.

[ 3 : 46 ] And then verse 15, chapter 5, Look carefully how you walk. Walk in wisdom. So you see, there's a difference in the way that we walk, the way we live out our lives as a result of this grace.

And it's very interesting that Paul starts with calling us to walk in unity. Eager in verse 3, to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

And, you know, that's his first concern. It makes sense because in chapter 2, Paul says that all these hostile forces of evil have been overcome by Jesus Christ.

That he is the power greater than any evil. And what he does in his love is that he unites enemies. He unites Jews and Gentiles to be one body.

He unites male and female, free and slave, in love under the headship of Jesus Christ and his power. So that even people who are enemies by nature, who would have nothing to do with each other by their position in life, are united.

[ 4 : 54 ] And it's the living proof that Jesus has all authority. And that he is about changing, transforming the world. In fact, Ephesians 1.10 tells us that God's plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in Jesus.

Things in heaven and things on earth. So unity is incredibly important. And the church, in very practical ways, is like a pilot project, showing what he will do, what God will do with all of renewed creation one day, in eternity.

That unity is proclaimed to the whole world when the church is walking in a manner worthy of its calling. When we are walking in unity. So this is why unity is such a critical thing for Paul.

And I want to talk about two aspects of that unity. The first aspect is a unity of the spirit. And this is something to be maintained.

So it's something that's given. It's a given unity. Look at verse 3 again. It says, Be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

[ 6 : 13 ] Now, that unity is given by Jesus Christ. Back in chapter 2.14, it says, Now in Christ Jesus, you once who were far away from God have been brought near by the blood of Jesus.

He himself is our peace, who has made us both one, meaning Jews and Gentiles. And he's broken down in his flesh the dividing walls of hostility.

So Jesus is our peace. He has made us one in that way. We can't see that incredible spiritual truth, but we can see the outworking of it.

And it's the work of the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts to the reality of the love of Christ. It's his work to help us to experience Jesus more and more and to unite us to the life of the Trinity. We are one because the one Lord Jesus has done this for us all. It's a given fact. And in verses 4 through 6, we're going to see a little bit more about the nature of that unity.

[ 7 : 17 ] You see it in the life of the Trinity that we actually are part of, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And he says this. He says there is one body. And the one body is the church in heaven gathered around the throne, which is known as the church triumphant.

They rest from their labors here on earth. And then there's the church militant that we're a part of. It's called militant because we're fighting the good fight, the fight of faith, the fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And both of these realities of the church are united in heaven and earth in one body that belongs to Jesus. That's why it's called the body of Christ. That is the universal church.

I think the question I'm asked most frequently by people who are new to the Anglican service is why do you say in your creed that you believe in the Catholic church?

I thought you guys were Anglicans. And the answer is that that word Catholic is another name for that universal church. And so our church of St. John's is a local expression of that heavenly gathering around the Lamb of God.

[ 8 : 31 ] And we are all united in one body. That is the Catholic church that we say that we believe in. We believe this to be the reality. And we know that by faith.

And in that body there's one spirit. And this is so important for us because the Holy Spirit fills each true member of the church when you begin that Christian walk.

He gives new birth by actually planting the life of God into our personalities. So he strengthens us and he coordinates our wills so that we live and think as newborn people of God.

And in that way the Holy Spirit works so that Jesus dwells in our hearts by faith. And that dwelling in our hearts is what unites us with Christians around the world.

And I experienced this when I was at GAFCON in a remarkable way because there were so many countries represented there. 40 countries. Really diverse countries.

[ 9 : 36 ] With many, many different languages although thankfully everybody spoke English as a second language. There was this sense of deep connection with every person that I met.

And a sense as we gathered together as a group and heard God's word together really wonderfully expounded. And sang together and even danced together a little bit. I'm glad I'm not on video when that happens.

But there is this immediate sense of being part of some very deep fellowship. Even though all of the things of this world separate us.

Distance, language, culture. All of these things. We are one because of this fact that Christ dwells in each of us.

And now being part, being in one body with one Holy Spirit means that all of us have one hope. And that's the sense I got in this big gathering that all of us have this hope.

[10:34] The same exact hope that you and I have of the future fulfillment where we will be filled with the fullness of God. We will see Jesus and we will be like him. This is the common future that we all have.

And all of that depends on allegiance to Jesus. trusting in him who is our Lord in verse 5. And that fact is what our one faith is.

It's very simply the Lord. It is Jesus himself. And that's proclaimed in baptism where we see that we are united to Jesus Christ in his death and his resurrection by the Holy Spirit.

We're brought into this life of God. Into this Catholic, this body of Christ that is the church. And therefore, there is one God and Father of all, it goes on to say.

We have the same Father. We are related to him by adoption. All who believe know that God is over all and in us all. And there's this incredible spiritual reality that has taken place.

[11:45] So that is what is in common to every believer in Jesus. We belong to each other because we belong to Christ. There's no in-group. There's no separated group that's closer to God or somehow has a higher status because all of us have the same status.

It is that we are sinners saved by grace, God's grace, and equal in God's sight. We don't create this unity. This is something that we have in Jesus Christ.

It's a mark of being part of this that we are eager to maintain that unity. That's a sign that we're part of it. We have this, you know, deep desire to see that unity maintained.

And that unity is maintained in very practical ways. He says it in verse 2. He says in verse 2, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

Now notice that it says all humility. humility. That means completely humble. Now if I was to ask you, are you completely humble? I hope I know what the answer would be.

[12:55] If you were Ted Turner, you would say, if only I had a little humility, I would be perfect. So think about that for a minute. But what this means is that we need to work on these qualities.

And it is a quality that's very simple. I think C.S. Lewis put it very well. He said, true humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.

And that's a very good way of putting it. God takes us out of ourselves in this kind of humility. And I want to share with you some problems that took place at GAFCON, just so you don't think it was just this wonderful spectacle with no sin involved.

There were some problems. One of the problems was that for cultural reasons, there were some that felt that they didn't need to teach to treat the volunteers at GAFCON, of which there were many wonderful people who served.

But they didn't feel they needed to treat them with respect. So this was a problem. And the dean of the cathedral was fantastic. He stood up. He said, I'm saying this very gracefully, but there are a number of you who have to apologize and you have to repent right now.

[14:07] And he was right. Now, the word got through and I believe that true humility took place because the next day the dean got up and said, the volunteers all want to thank you.

They are feeling very, very appreciated. The other thing that happened is that the provinces had to break up into their own areas like North America and South America and Africa.

And we had to give input for the statement that's at the back of the church just so that we all helped to edit it in some way. Now, North America had this very interesting situation, which I think is culture as well.

We all wanted to have our voice and all the special interests wanted to be noted in that statement as well. And thankfully, one of the bishops reminded us that this statement is not all about you.

In fact, just to be nice about it, you are a tiny fraction of the Anglican communion throughout the world. And, you know, I think we realized we had to repent of our arrogance and consider the rest of the church.

[15:14] These issues have no bearing to somebody in Sudan who is dealing with the loss of everything, food, church, home, and trying to figure out how to minister the gospel in that setting.

So, you know, there had to be a humility and repentance that took place in that. Give up those things which we feel is our right. Now, the ancient world, this was a challenge for the Ephesians as

well because the ancient world did not see humility as a great virtue.

In fact, they saw it as a vice. They understood that it was something that would allow others to walk over you as a doormat. But the power of Christ, we're seeing in Ephesians, is brought to bear into the world through his humility.

It is by his death on the cross that the extraordinary power of God to save us and to unite us under him is worked out. And so the gentleness that you see in that, after humility, in that verse, is not weakness.

It's really a strong determination not to exert force to get what I want, but instead to act in love towards other people. It's a strong determination to do that.

[16:32] And that process really culminates, it works out by people bearing with one another in love. And that is probably what the rest of Ephesians is about.

It's about bearing with one another in love. The power of the gospel is Jesus loving the world and dying on a cross, so the real mark of power for the church is seen in love.

It is in love for Christ, in love for each other, and in love for the world. And those values are the polar opposite to the world's values.

It was then in Ephesians time and it is now. It's why cultures are often broken and confused and ours is. But the evidence that the gospel is true is seen in this counter-cultural lifestyle of service, of love, of humility, of gentleness, and forbearance.

So you see, the unity of the Spirit is this foundational reality that's ours in Christ and it is something that we maintain. But there's another kind of unity as well.

[17:43] It's a unity that we work at, that we are, that God is producing through our acting on faith. It is the unity that is to be attained.

We have to work out the unity of faith. And we know that to be true because we, there's a change in verse 7. We were talking about us as a whole group and then it says there are individually something that's going on here.

God is doing a work in you so that you will be part of this movement of God that we will attain something that is not here yet. the unity of faith.

Now the, it begins in verse 7 with but. You look at that verse 7 it says, but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

And what this is telling us is that unity does not mean that there is not uniqueness. We are different and God preserves these differences as he shapes us to look like Jesus Christ.

[18:49] And in fact, he is saying here that something is being done in each of you that means you have a responsibility to act according to the measure of grace or gift that God has given to us.

And there's a master plan of how the church as a whole is going to attain the unity of faith. And there's three steps. And I'll just go through them briefly.

The first, very simply, is that the ascended Jesus gives gifts to his church. So you look at verse 8. It's a quote from the Psalm. It says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

He gave gifts to all people throughout the world who come to faith in him. And in saying he ascended, what does it mean that he also descended into the lower regions into the earth?

He came and served us. He showed his power in dying on a cross. And then he ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

[19:53] So this Jesus has the authority. He has the power to give gifts in an extraordinary way to us. And the gift that he gives us to attain the unity of faith is the word of God first of all.

So look at verse 11. He gave the apostles and the prophets and these are the foundational gifts. The foundational gifts that God has given to us in his word.

The apostles bring to us God's word. The prophets do as well. And they're the channels of revelation. The Bible's written through them. And then he gives the continuing gifts of evangelists. Those are gospel proclaimers who plant churches and pastor teachers who nurture churches and who grow them. Those people have one specific mission and goal and that is to bring God's word to the body.

And these people are great gifts to the church. So in this work of attaining the unity of faith God gives to you God's word. And we know this is a precious gift because it comes from Jesus.

[21:03] He ascended to heaven in order to give us this gift. But why does he do that? It is this is the second stage that has a lot to do with each of us.

It's very pointed. So if you look at verse 12 he says here's the reason. To equip the saints for the work of ministry and if you turn the page for building up the body of Christ.

And he uses those saints I think to say that there is something very exalted. There is something extraordinary about being placed in the position of being able to serve the Lord Jesus in the church. And so all of a sudden the spotlights which are all up here right now should turn all to you and say you are the ministers of the church. Jesus who rose and ascended into heaven and who has authority to give every good gift has given you gifts so that you can serve him.

So that you can be ministers representatives of Jesus in this world. That word equip which is what is used about the word of God it equips you is from that root *katartizo* and you know that word *artizo* this is what we do to equip people who are studying to be full time clergy but it's saying look *artizo* is for all of you and that word comes from the same word that had to do with mending nets when the disciples were called by Jesus they were *artizoing* their nets and what that meant was they were mending them they were making them fit to be able to catch fish as they were built up and as they were mended and God's word does this work in our life it repairs the damage in our life from sin it builds us up it equips us it strengthens us as you would with a net to do the work that he has given us to do so that hearing God's word and obeying it makes us adequate for the task it builds us up so that we can attain the unity of faith as a church together and it's a building up that's not just in numbers that is important but more especially it means building strength and quality and Christ likeness so that we are more like the head that's what the gift

[ 23 : 32 ] Jesus gift of his word does for us and as we are serving as we are acting on God's word and being ministers his ministers to one another and to the world that unity of faith leads us it says in verse 13 to the knowledge of the son of God what does that mean it seems to be saying that as we serve Jesus we come to know him in more than just a theological sense about who Jesus is but we actually get to know Jesus in a personal way relationally we come to know Jesus more fully our love for him deepens and it goes on to say that we will be mature because we will enter the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ it seems it seems here that living a worthy life together in which we are serving Christ being his ministers we begin to experience the fullness of Jesus

Christ now the assumption on all of this is that we actually have to work to help each other to attain the unity of faith this is something that doesn't happen just to individuals the Bible here is saying that the maturity is happening for the whole church it assumes that we are encouraging each other to grow up in Jesus that we are stimulating one another's faith that we are helping each other to be more and more dependent on Jesus and his grace so for instance as you are having fellowship after this service encourage each other as you hear the news of one another's life the important and the more mundane things encourage each other speak a word of God's grace into that commit yourself to pray for that person in small groups we don't just do exegesis but we apply the passage and as we are working out what discipleship looks like at St.

John's what the area of faith in our vision is this is very important for us and it's happening in wonderful ways in our ministries that we spend time applying God's word into our lives and praying into the passage we spend time helping each other work out what does God's word mean for my relationships at home in my family for my relationships at work or at school or with that free time that I have of leisure with friends you see the goal of the discipleship programs at St.

John's is not to have an experience itself that's wonderful of reading God's word although that's a great side benefit but the point of it all is to strengthen equip encourage us to be Jesus representatives in the world in the places where we spend our time in the real nitty gritty aspects of our life so that we live intentionally for Jesus in our city it's not easy to do but with God's help through each other helping this is very possible for us and that's how we mature together as Christians that's how we grow into an effective church a church that's maturing and the wonderful thing about this church kind of church is it's stable it's not blown off course and we are being buffeted all the time look at verse 14 it really describes it in a memorable way it says as we grow to the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may not no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness in deceitful schemes well I think that this perfectly describes what has happened to much of the Anglican world in the west is that we have blown off course they really affected by every wind of doctrine by deceit as well by human cunning by craftiness we have gone off the rails and this is why GAFCON is so important it is about maturity in Christ it is about standing firm about moving ahead

in ministry to the world with this gospel that transforms and and saves the world and is bringing people all under the one Lord Jesus Christ this is a gift so we need one another to keep us strong and the word gifts are given to protect us in that way now the third thing third movement is that as gifts are given to equip the word of God and as the church develops in maturity the third part of God's plan is that the world will see God's love in action in the church in very practical ways so at the end of our passage in verse 15 it says rather rather than being blown around by every doctrine we speak the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into [ 28 : 44 ] Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped that's each of us when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love it's a great vision it is the love of Christians helping each other building each other up praying for opportunities in the workplace praying to be Christians in the world as we support one another then the body will grow in Christ likeness and effectiveness it's going to build itself up in love and that speaks a powerful message to the world who sees it I love the expression speaking the truth in love because you may know that that's a verb it's about truthing in love and that's the mark of the united church it's living and speaking whatever is right whatever is true in love and so a mature church brings the light of the gospel into people's lives into their joys and into their sorrows we do that individually we do that as a group together as well and the gospel transforms those every area of our life and that makes us more wholehearted in our commitment to

Christ as a people and there's growth that comes from Christ himself in verse 16 from him the whole body grows and is joined together his life produces a true discipleship and we can't be the true church the church God wants us to be without love between the members of that church and that is what speaks volumes to the world this is a life that's worthy of our eternal kingdom because God is helping us in this way to be kind of like an outpost of God's eternal kingdom it's an expression of that for the world so I want to close by saying that this passage calls us to ask the question how can I contribute and for leaders if you're in leadership of a small group or in some sort of leadership in ministry there's a call here to help everyone we lead to discover and mobilize their gifts the variety of gifts of grace that each one of us have that

Jesus has given to us we all have something to contribute there's this huge diversity and it's important for us to help one another see what those gifts are and then secondly all of us who are members of the body need to be willing to contribute in any way that we can and you are doing that in marvelous ways and I think the great thing about this passage is it makes us really think what are the possibilities God has for us this Jesus has ascended as the one who's given gifts well there are incredible possibilities for that what is my gifting how can I give of myself in this particular stage in my life in the busyness I might have with children or with work or with school what can I do right now because we often think about what we don't have time to do about what this stage in our life prevents us from doing but think about what you really can do for him this week this is a vision God has for us we are all in the ministry so that we can achieve his purposes for the body which is the church so that we can actually live out this earnest call this urgent call in chapter in verse one urging you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called may God give you a fresh vision of the this amazing calling on your life and may he strengthen you to walk in a manner worthy of his calling walk in the unity that he has given to us in Jesus Christ amen  
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