

RELEASE DATE: 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024

## **“Unity in the Body of Christ” - Ephesians Chapter 4 v 1-16**

*4<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”<sup>[a]</sup>*

*<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds<sup>[c]</sup> and teachers,<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood,<sup>[e]</sup> to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may 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. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

These verses make the strongest possible declaration of and call for the unity of Christians, the unity of the Church, and the unity of the work of the Holy Spirit among us. Lord in verses 5 is thought to refer to Christ – our Saviour. All of this unity flows out from the oneness of God, the one and only true God. The one Father is Father of all and over all. The stress is on the universal nature and authority of God the Father. (Read Matthew Chapter 3 verses 16 & 17 and Chapter 5 verses 43-48)

To be numbered among Christ's elect brings with it responsibilities. Election is a calling to live up to, not a possession to cherish. Election calls the church to unity and cooperative ministry with the gifts given to each member. The call to serve Christ is a high honour. It should bring humility and devotion. Devotion to Christ expresses itself in loving behaviour. Only such behaviour shows we are worthy of the high calling.

As God is One, so is the church. To serve Christ the church must maintain its unity. Each member must serve in gentle, humble love, seeking peace and unity with every other member. The one Spirit in our lives leads us to be one church, not a church with divisions and splits. The one hope in Christ is greater reason for unity than any disagreements which might separate us. Our commitment to the one Lord and His church made in baptism should lead to unity despite all temptations to divide.

God's purpose is to create a great family of free persons to be His own people. When people trust Christ as their Saviour, God pours His Spirit into their hearts. The Spirit incorporates us into the common life of the Christian community. Christians should live with humility, patience, and especially love, so that the common life of the community will not be broken. Jesus had prayed that his followers would be as united with each other as he was with the Father. (John Chapter 17 verses 20-23).

Our service of Believers Baptism emphasises the unity of Christian believers because they are baptised 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" (see verse 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. Verse six sets out in no uncertain terms the absolute supreme authority that God has over everything He has created, and that includes all of us sat around this table this morning (and those who may have read it later).

When Jesus our Saviour ascended back to His Father, He didn't forget the people He left behind. He sent the Spirit with gifts to equip his church for ministry. Not that everyone had all the gifts, it was God who apportioned the various gifts to those He chose to receive them. Jesus is the one who came from heaven to earth, then ascended back to heaven with the resurrection victory capturing all evil powers, and then sent the Spirit back to earth. Christ gives gifts to His church for a purpose - to equip believers to do the work of ministry and by doing so to build up the church.

Every Christian is called to do the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. The goal of Christ is that such equipping, ministering, and building up will go on until complete maturity is achieved. Every Christian has the responsibility to help every other member of the body of Christ to grow in faith. Maturity leads a Christian to be discerning in what to believe as true.

Teachers with wrong motives should not deceive mature Christians. The church grows spiritually and numerically when each part of the body lives under Christ's control.

The New Testament teaches that God ordained leaders in the church. Their purpose is to equip each individual believer to be a priest. This great doctrine of the priesthood of the believer means that every individual Christian has direct access to God through Christ, the one Mediator between God and us (See 1 Timothy Chapter 2 verse 5). We need no human mediator between us and God. Jesus Christ gives us direct access to his father (See Hebrews Chapter 4 verses 14-16).

God's gifts to the church are persons, not formal offices. God is concerned about the overall leadership team in his church, the ones he gave as apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (or in our case pastors) and the teachers. These leaders are not given to the church to do everything. Leaders are given to the church to equip the members so that ALL might do the work of ministry TOGETHER and so build up the body of Christ.

As said on a previous occasion, all Christians do not have the same calling or function, **but** all Christians have the same responsibility to be ministers, (See Romans Chapter 15 verse 27).

Those who perform the duties of the listed offices, function as equippers who prepare the rest of the fellowship for their work for Christ. All Christians are called to use their own gifts in ministry. We all need to "be prepared" for each and every opportunity that God sends our way to speak of, and for the great and loving God Almighty that we love and serve.

*Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church-based, morning home group on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2024. All scripture is from the ESV Translation.*

