

## **Build up the body of Christ** **Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16**

*<sup>1</sup> As a prisoner in the Lord, therefore, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. <sup>2</sup> Live with all humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in the one hope of your calling. <sup>5</sup> There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all. <sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of the gift from Christ. <sup>11</sup> He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ's activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love.*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is written in two basic parts. The first half, chapters 1-3, explain God's gracious plan of salvation that brought both Jew and Gentile sinners to faith and into one body. In the second half, chapters 4-6, Paul urges the Ephesians to put their unity into practice. Today we start the second half of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter four Paul urges us to build up the body of Christ. We build up his body by living in unity. We build up his body through the use of God's gift of the public ministry.

In the first six verses of chapter four Paul urges the Ephesians to live in unity. Paul had spent the first part of this letter explaining why they had such unity. There wasn't anything in themselves that promoted such unity. He had reminded them how they entered life as spiritually dead creatures. They were dead in trespasses and sins. They went where God forbid them to go. They failed to hit the target. But God in his grace took these spiritually lifeless creatures and made them alive in Christ. The punishment their sins deserved, Christ suffered for them when he died on a cross. It is all by grace they had been saved. They were saved through faith in Christ Jesus. This was God's gracious gift to them. They had nothing to boast about, at least not in themselves. Every good deed that they could possibly perform, was already prepared in advance by God himself. The Lord had done that for all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Now Paul urges them to live a life worthy of the calling they had received. They were people united with one another through Christ's saving work. Paul grants that this won't be easy. It requires total humility that gladly yields to others. They bear with other's faults and weaknesses in patient, self-denying love. Why do that? That way they can hold on to God's precious gift of unity. In case they had forgotten, Paul reminds them of all the blessings of God that are a part of this spiritual unity. They are one body. The members of one body do not pull apart. They cooperate. Believers have one Spirit. Individuals are made believers by the Spirit who continues to dwell in them and makes them his temple. They are united in spirit by one hope that they share. The hope is that we will be raised on the Last Day. We will stand acquitted in God's judgment. We will be welcomed to our eternal inheritance. Paul urges us to bear with one another so that neither they nor we might miss out on the glorious fulfillment of our hope.

Believers share one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The Lord dwells in their hearts by faith. They are going to see fellow believers as Jesus see them. We are all so precious to him that he was willing to die for us. As believers give Jesus the 1<sup>st</sup> place in their hearts and minds, they will be drawn closer to one another. Faith in Jesus, that is identical in all believers, draws us together. That faith was given them by the same means of baptism. Appreciation for this gift is another unifying factor.

They all have one God and Father who covers them all, unites them, and is in every one of them. He is the Father of us all and is above all. Believers acknowledge his headship. He is above them as their Father. They are his family. A compelling reason to maintain harmony.

God is through all. He made believers his instruments to do good works. He supplies all the opportunities. God enables them to do good when he raised them up together with Christ. God made them to be active in living their faith.

God is in all. This calls for awe and admiration. He is in each fellow believer. So we will treat them with respect. We don't let any little flaw in them obscure what God has made of them. These opening verses of chapter four make us marvel at the Paul's Spirit-shaped skill in motivating us to do what needs to be done.

In verse seven Paul adds a new point that he connects to the previous verses. Paul writes: *But to each one of us grace was given, according to the measure of the gift from Christ.* Since all are united into one body, all have gifts to be used in that body. Our Savior carefully assigns the gifts for each of us to use. He measures out which gifts and how many we have. They're not all the same. But they are all to be used in maintaining unity in the body. Paul describes some of those gifts that Christ measured out in his first letter to the Corinthians: *There are various kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of ministries, and yet the same Lord. There are various kinds of activity, but the same God, who produces all of them in everyone. Each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* Then Paul mentions a message of wisdom, a message of knowledge, healing gifts, besides a few more before he says: *One and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them to each one individually as he desires (12:4-11).*

So what gift or gifts has God granted you to be used to build up the body of Christ? According to Scripture everyone has gifts that God wants them to use to built up his body, the church. That does not mean that one person's gifts are more important than another's. It also means that no one can say "I have nothing to offer." Everyone has at least one gift that can be used in the church. What if you don't know your gift? Ask someone close to you. They might know. Try signing up for something. You might be surprised what God has given you. Is Everyone Outreach for you? Well, do you care about the people in your life, some who may not know their Savior yet? You might be just what they need—a caring heart with a faith that can move mountains. Well, maybe your faith that can only move small mountains. But you may be surprised of what gifts God has given for you to use to build up his church.

We skip a few verses in Ephesians four to see how our Lord equips us to build up his body, the church. Paul had just talked about the special Giver who measured out gifts to each of us. Now he mentions another special gift that he's given to his church—the public ministry. *He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body*

*of Christ.* This list of public ministers is not exhaustive. These offices were not political. They were spiritual leaders for his church. Paul isn't saying that each church has to have these individual forms of ministry or it cannot function as a church. The reason why Christ gave public ministers to his church was not so they can do all the work. Instead, he gave them to equip the people that make up God's church. So the body that belongs to Christ is built up, public ministers must function to equip them. They are equipped to perform service work. And this service work is done to build up the body of Christ.

Paul goes on to state the goal for equipping believers for service work to build up the body of Christ. *This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ.* Paul refers back to verse 7, to each one given gifts. He includes himself as one who hasn't reached the goal either. The goal that all Christians are striving for is unity in the faith. We don't want there to be any divisions in our beliefs. Paul further describes the goal that Christians are trying to reach as that of a mature man. Why a mature man? I thought Jesus said we should have the faith of a child. Paul explains in the next verse why we need spiritual maturity. *The goal is that we would no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, when people use tricks and invent clever ways to lead us astray.* The point Paul is making in these verses is how a small child can easily be swayed. Paul also adds the picture of boat at the mercy of threatening waves. That person is out of control and in grave danger. They are being tossed and carried about by every teaching found in the trickery of men. There's nothing honest here. Paul uses these pictures to describe our need for growth.

Paul then contrasts being tossed about and carried by men's teachings with positive growth. *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we would in all things grow up into Christ, who is the head.* Communicating the truth is quite different from the teachings of men. As we speak the truth we do so in love. Paul urges Christians to grow into Christ in everything. This growth is for all Christians who make up the body with our Savior as head.

The final verse pulls together all the thoughts expressed in the previous verses. *From him the whole body, being joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows in accordance with Christ's activity when he measured out each individual part. He causes the growth of the body so that it builds itself up in love.* God wants all believers to actively work at preserving his gracious gift of unity of faith. To do this Christ gave each believer gifts to use. He also gave public ministers to equip believers to build one another up in the faith. Each and every believer is to be active in using the gifts given them by a victorious Savior. That way they can support and serve one another. As all Christians do so, Christ uses them to build up his body in faith and so bring them into a greater unity as their head.

So Paul urges each one of us to build up the body of Christ. Use the gifts that your Savior has given you. Maintain the unity you enjoy as part of the body of believers. And treasure the ministry your Lord has provided to keep you growing in faith and in knowledge of the Son of God. Then you'll become a mature Christian no longer be tossed about by man's teachings. Instead you'll be firmly grounded to speak the truth in love so you can lead others to know their Savior as well. God grant this for Jesus' sake.