

Living In Resurrection Power
(Week 6)
Ephesians 4:7-16
“The Body Of Christ”

Introduction

“Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift”
Ephesians 4:7

In **verses 1-6** of the **fourth chapter of Ephesians**, Paul discusses the common traits of every believer. However, in **verse seven**, he begins to explain how we are all vastly different. Every believer in Christ, though they share many commonalities with their fellow believers, is as unique as an individual snowflake. God has made each one of us to be one of a kind, when it comes to our identity in Christ. It is this diversity that makes the Church strong.

Paul often refers to the church as “The Body of Christ” in his writings. It is a perfect example of how we are to function in this world. We come together in spiritual unity to carry out the mission that has been set before us. Jesus is the head, and we, as members of His body, are to carry out His directives in complete obedience and unity. There can be no divisions in the body, if we are to be the example that He intends for us to be. Remember, what Paul stated earlier in this letter to the Ephesians:

“This is so that God’s multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. This is according to His eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Ephesians 3:10-11

So you see, everyone on earth, and in the spiritual realms, should be able to watch the church and see what God is up to! This is exactly how the church is to function, as a living organism being led by the very wisdom of God. If we are in disunity, or we allow sin to impair our walk, then we become ineffective in our divine mission. It is imperative that the church remain in Christ, so that we can be one in Spirit and in purpose. How we conduct ourselves as a church will show whether or not we are truly being led by Christ. In Him, there is no confusion, nor discord.

God has wondrously put together a body by which He can be glorified. It is not the responsibility of the people to build the church. No my friends, THAT is Christ’s doing and His alone:

“...and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”
Matthew 16:18

It is Christ who builds His church, and not us. He chooses whom he sees fit to add to His body. Therefore, we must do everything that is within our power to cherish those whom He has placed within our midst, for each of them are vital to our mission. I never cease to be amazed at the types of people that God chooses to work His mighty wonders. Take for example the disciples of Christ. If you were putting together a global corporation to take a message to all nations, you would never pick a single one of those guys to do it. Not in a million years! But Christ used these uneducated fishermen and tax collectors to turn the whole world upside down.

Do you feel unqualified and inadequate this morning? Then congratulations! You are just the kind of person that God uses to do great things! But you cannot do it alone. You must be connected to Christ and become a working part of His body, the church, to realize your full spiritual potential. Christ has built not an organization, but a living organism, called the church out of just ordinary people of faith, and if they will but stay connected to Him, empowered by the same power that raised Christ from the dead, then they will do amazing things as His body. The Spirit has seen to it that the church shall indeed reveal the very wisdom of God by its Diversification, Sanctification, and Edification. This is our highest calling and should be taken as the very reason that we live. We should make it our goal to please Him in all that we do (**2 Corinthians 5:9**). Are you functioning as a vital part of His body today?

Diversification

“Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. For it says: When He ascended on high, He took the captives captive: He gave gifts to the people. But what does ‘He ascended’ mean except that He also descended to the lower parts of the earth? The One Who descended is also the One Who ascended far above all the heavens, to fill all things. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers...”

Ephesians 4:7-11

After Paul explains that all Spirit-filled believers will share in the personality of Christ; having his humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace (**vs. 2**), he goes on to explain that The Spirit also endows all believers with a diverse group of spiritual gifts. A more complete explanation and description of these “grace gifts” can be found in **1 Corinthians 12** and **Romans 12**. But here in Ephesians the Apostle is more concerned as to the purpose of the gifts. He begins his argument by explaining that the gifts are given to us as a measure of grace from Christ, our “conquering hero”.

“When He ascended on high, He took the captives captive: He gave gifts to the people...”

Paul is actually quoting from the Septuagint version of **Psalm 68:18**, where King David is writing of his own victorious return from battle. In those days, when Kings went to war, they brought back the prisoners that had been taken captive by the enemy, along with any other “spoils of war” in a grand processional, meant to celebrate a glorious victory. Paul uses this illustration to point out that Christ descended from His heavenly throne to come to “the lower regions” of this world (meaning death and the grave) in order to “take the captives, captive”. He defeated Satan and took from him those souls that he had enslaved to sin and death. In this great defeat of the enemy, Christ led those that He had rescued from bondage, and just as a king would divide the spoils war, He endowed upon the rescued ones all manner of spiritual gifts. I truly love the part of the verse that says;

“He took the captives, captive.”

What a beautiful picture of who we are in Christ! We, who were once held captive by sin, have been set free and are now “captivated by Christ”. Does this describe your relationship with our risen Lord? Are you truly “captivated” by Him? For if you are not, then serving Him will be a burden or an obligation, and you will quickly become burned out. But, if you have been truly captivated by Christ, then to serve Him is nothing less than a great honor.

Paul goes on to say that the gifts are just as diverse as those to whom they are bestowed. Some were called to be Apostles (a word meaning delegates) and prophets. These were the foundation builders of the newly formed church. These men were specially gifted in order to establish the fledgling church in faith and doctrine. There are no longer any Apostles or prophets today, for they were only necessary to begin the church. If you are going to a church where the leader refers to himself as an apostle or prophet, then you need to find a new church, for your leader is sadly misinformed.

After the succession of apostles and prophets, when *The New Testament* was completed and The Word of God was made accessible, then a new set of leaders took up the mantle of the church. These evangelists and pastor-teachers took the baton, as it were, in this relay race of the body of Christ. These have been specially gifted in order to teach and make disciples (the word means “learners”), teaching them all things that Christ has commanded (**Matthew 28:20**). In short, the responsibility of these leaders is to carefully explain The Word of God so that the entire body will reach maturity. There are many other various gifts that Paul doesn’t specifically mention here, but they are all designed to assist those who are called to be the teachers of the body. There are many gifts, but only One Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:4**).

Sanctification

“...equipping the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.” **Ephesians 4:12-14**

The Apostle goes on to explain that the purpose of the spiritual gifts is so that every member of the body “matures” or “grows up”, until we reach unity and “the knowledge of The Son”. This is another way of saying that we become “sanctified” by The Holy Spirit. When we are born again, we are proclaimed as “Justified” through Christ, which means that we are clothed in His righteousness and not our own. But then The Holy Spirit begins to do a work in us to transform us into the very image of Christ. This process is known as “sanctification”, and it simply means that we are being remade so that we are not only “clothed with Christ”, but literally transformed into His image as well.

Justification happens the moment that we are born again, but sanctification takes place over time. God uses His Word, Prayer, as well as, trials and suffering to conform us into the image of His Son. This is why the teaching of The Word is so very vital to our church. This is why the Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church that the “speaking gifts” were of the utmost importance within their body (**1 Corinthians 14**).

Paul goes on to say that as we are being sanctified (growing into maturity) then we are less likely to be “little children being tossed around”. The word he uses here for “children” literally means an infant that cannot speak on its own. Those of us who have had children remember all too well, the life of a baby. We hand them back and forth to other people, and they are compelled to go wherever we take or send them. They have no power to decide for themselves what they should do. Those decisions are all made for them. The “baby Christian” is no different. They are not mature enough in the doctrines of the church to “speak for themselves”, and therefore, they are vulnerable to all kinds of ridiculous beliefs and whims of the latest false doctrine. This is why that sound Biblical teaching within the body is so very important, for without it, no one will ever mature in their knowledge of The Son of God.

It is the responsibility of those entrusted with teaching of the scriptures to make sure that their spiritual gifts are being fully utilized to equip the saints by the teaching of sound doctrine. Your pastor will stand before God and give an account for the way that you have been taught, and therefore, he should take his responsibility very seriously. And, it is also incumbent upon the body to support his efforts as he tries to carry out God’s calling to teach.

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable to you.” **Hebrews 13:17**

Simply put, every healthy church will place a great emphasis upon the teaching of The Word and prayer. The more time that your teaching leaders have to prepare for such things, then the better equipped the church will become. This is why all other spiritual gifts within the body should be directed at supporting those who teach doctrine. It is for this very reason that the office of deacon was instituted in the early church, so that the pastors ability to pray and study The Word would not be hindered by other aspects of ministry.

“The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, ‘It would not be right for us to to give up preaching the Word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of The Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.’” **Acts 6:2-3**

Apart from the teaching of The Word, there can be no sanctification.

Edification

“But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him Who is the head — Christ. From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.” ***Ephesians 4:15-16***

Several years ago, I was at a pastor’s conference, when I heard an older pastor who was very near being burned out say, “I love the ministry. It’s the people that I don’t like!” Of course, he was making a joke, and we all laughed, but the truth of the matter is, we all can find ourselves at the place where we just want to give up. People’s lives can get messy and the demands that they can place upon a minister can be overwhelming at times. But as ministers, we must always remember, that the sole purpose of ministry is to build up and encourage the people. The reason we teach is so that the church will be edified (built up).

Too many people have the wrong impression about ministry. Using the spiritual gifts that God gave to each of us isn’t really about US at all. It’s about using them to encourage others. For example, I don’t always “enjoy” preaching. Quite honestly, for a few days before I am to stand in the pulpit and deliver a message, I am a nervous wreck. I have never enjoyed public speaking of any kind, and when I was in school, I tried to get out of standing before the class using any excuse I could think of. You may be surprised to hear that, but it is true. So why do I do it, week after week, year after year. First, and foremost, because God has called me to do it. And second, although I don’t exactly love public speaking, I do love teaching *The Bible* so that people can come to know who Christ is on a more personal level. I am truly blessed, when I see the “light come on” in someone’s eyes, and I know that they just “got it”. I am especially blessed, when someone comes up to me and tells me that something I have taught them from God’s Word helped them to change their lives! I mean, what could be better than that?!

Paul calls this, “speaking the truth in love”. Sometimes it means telling people something that they don’t particularly want to hear. But all preaching must be done in such a way that the hearers realize you are preaching to them, because you truly care for them. Teaching is about lovingly correcting error and encouraging others that God’s way truly is best for them. I never want to preach in such a way that people will feel that I am talking down to them. There are plenty who do just that. I want to lift people up.

Many pastors use guilt to motivate people into doing what they want. This is not Biblical preaching. Guilt may work on people in the short term, but it does not change lives. Love changes lives! We have been called to encourage people to fall in love with Christ. If they do this, then the sinful things of this world will become less and less attractive to them. As ministers, the best way to keep from getting burned out is to keep our own personal love relationship with Christ alive and well, so that we will allow Him to love others through us. Show me a burned out minister, and I will show you someone who isn’t being afforded enough time to spend with God. It is imperative for those who would minister to have adequate time for their own personal relationship with God. You cannot do ministry in the flesh. If we are to minister in The Spirit, then we need to spend time being directed by The Spirit.

The purpose of ministry, the very reason we have been given spiritual gifts, is for the edification (building up) of the body. My gifts have been given for me to help you. Your gifts have been given to help me. As we all focus on strengthening one another, then all of us will be built up together. In short, we all need each other! It is when we use our spiritual gifts to elevate ourselves, that we grieve The Holy Spirit. If you don’t believe me, just read the two letters that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Their main problem? They were using their gifts to show off their own spirituality, rather than for the edification of the church. Paul didn’t want the Ephesians to fall into the same trap. Sadly, if they had only listened, the church at Ephesus would have been spared the rebuke that Christ would later send them in the book of Revelation:

“I know that you have persevered and endured hardships for the sake of My Name, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.” ***Revelation 2:3-4***

So you see, ministry without love, an enduring love for Christ, as well as for His chosen people, is just noise (**1 Corinthians 13**). We have been saved by grace and empowered by The Spirit, who has endowed us all with “grace gifts”. These gifts are to be used lovingly, not for our own good, but for the welfare of others. The Church of Christ has been gifted in Diversification, for the purpose of Sanctification and Edification. Or in other words, we all have different gifts, so that we can strive to achieve holiness together, as we build one other up in love. Now that sounds like the church I want to be a part of. How about you? And All of God’s people said...TRUTH!!!