

## We Are United in Christ

We often talk about the concept of *One Church*. The fact that we are all part of the body of Christ and are one church despite the denominational and doctrinal lines we draw ourselves to label and divide us. This is nothing new. Even in Jesus' day, the Jews had different sects or factions that Jesus was able to use to his favor. There were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. There was a doctrinal disagreement between the two that separated them, though they worshipped together and served God together. Of course, they also crucified Christ together, but that's another topic.

When Jesus ascended almost 2000 years ago, he left behind apostles and disciples to preach the gospel and make disciples, thereby growing the church; the *one church*. He didn't give them instructions to divide up doctrinally. He told them to go and make disciples by spreading the gospel throughout the land. Over time it is man, who has been mostly well-intentioned, who has created all these divisions and doctrinal lines. It is also man who has been the one to start arguing over who is right and who is wrong over these doctrinal differences, not unlike when the Pharisees and Sadducees started arguing over the concept of resurrection.

Frankly, we believe we could do so much more for the Lord in his name if we stopped blustering about focusing on minor doctrinal differences and started doing exactly what Jesus told us to do, the way he showed us to do it. Let's face it, friends, the world is getting more and more difficult to practice Christianity the way we have over the past centuries. The idea of building bigger buildings and paying for advertising on bigger billboards is coming to an end. Recently the city of Boston, Massachusetts banned the Christian flag from being flown alongside other flags on public property. The more we focus on attendance, donations, and building size, the more we lose ground in the spiritual war being waged all around us. We are being separated spiritually by the enemy of our soul and will seemingly be easier to conquer that way.

We are here to tell you today that that is not the church Jesus instituted. Now we can't go back in time. We can't *go back to Egypt* so to speak. We can, however, make a course correction. With that, we want to look at Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians is a great book of instruction, for lack of a better term, for a growing church. It contains all sorts of great wisdom for growing groups and congregations as they minister to their communities. Chapter 4 also really cements the thought of a unified church body, not a fractured one.

Let's read Ephesians 4:1-7

(1) As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (3) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (4) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (7) But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.



The Apostle Paul clearly starts this portion of his letter to the church in Ephesus giving simple instruction of how they ought to act and why. He starts by urging them to live a life worthy of the calling they have received. Friends, when you said yes to Jesus' invitation for forgiveness and salvation you were adopted into the family of God. You took on the name of God as anyone does when they are adopted into a family. Live worthy of the name you have taken on; that of Christian. Don't do or say anything that will reflect poorly on the Lord. And when you do, because none of us is perfect, repent immediately and ask for forgiveness. Jesus is faithful to forgive you, in the name of the Father.

That's not easy to do, and we can't do it in our own power or ability. It takes the Holy Spirit living and working in us every day. Once again, Paul shares how we do these things. We're supposed to be gentle and patient, loving each other as brothers and sisters because we are. We have all been adopted into the family of God. He tells us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. He even tells us how to do that. He says to do that by keeping the peace with our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Paul then points out what many church leaders don't want to hear today. They want to focus on their group and ignore the rest. They want to only minister to *their own* and not the ones they disagree with. Verse 4 of Ephesians chapter 4 starts out, "There is one body". There is one body, friends. That is one church or one bride of Christ.

We are united in Christ. We need to act that way. We need to live that way. We need to preach and teach that way. We need to stop arguing over minor doctrinal differences and celebrate the eternal life we have all received through Christ Jesus.

If you have been with us for long or are part of a Cell Life Church ministry somewhere in the world, verses 11 and 12 of Ephesians chapter 4 should be quite familiar to you.

Ephesians 4:11-12

(11) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, (12) to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

This is a cornerstone piece of scripture for Cell Life Church and we preach it often. Whenever we have the opportunity to teach pastors and church leaders, this is foundational for our teaching.

Church leaders, you have a responsibility and biblical mandate to equip the people you have been entrusted to lead so they can effectively go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples. That is your first and most important priority with respect to ministry. When we, as church leaders, effectively build up the people God has entrusted us to lead, the church is built up.

Let's look at the next verse though. Because this instruction for us has a limit when it is no longer necessary. Let's read verse 13.

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## Ephesians 4:13

(13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

In other words, our role as church leaders only lasts until the people we are leading reach unity with the rest of the body and mature in Christ. Many church leaders do not lead their people to spiritual maturity. They prefer to keep their people dependent on them their whole lives. Much like a mother who refuses to allow her grown children to make their own decisions. This is not biblical! You should be teaching and equipping the people in your groups and congregations to pray, study the Bible, and serve on their own as they grow in Christ. Unfortunately, the more we focus on building bigger buildings, attracting more people, or raising more money, teaching and equipping our people becomes counterproductive to those goals.

When our primary focus is on Christ and giving him all the glory, it is easy. When our primary focus starts to try and keep some of the glory for ourselves, especially in the form of pride, we miss the mark and our efforts will be our own, not those of the Lord.

Church, this leadership model is nothing new. When we go back to Moses in Exodus chapter 18, we read about his service to all of Israel and how overwhelming it was. He was not a dictator. He was merely a prophet speaking for the Lord. At one point, Moses is so overwhelmed with the day to day duties of leading all of Israel and mediating their squabbles and arguments, his father-in-law speaking with the Spirit of the Lord, told him to appoint wise elders to hear these arguments and squabbles and mediate between them. Moses was not a dictator. He was the chief servant of the Lord.

The point of all this is found in the next 3 verses of Ephesians chapter 4.

## Ephesians 4:14-16

(14) Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. (15) Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (16) From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

That is the result of following Jesus' plan for growing the Church, that is His body. The people who have taken on the name Christian will no longer be like infants. We will no longer be tossed back and forth by popular teachings and the cunningness of the devil. We will be able to discern the devil's tactics and point them out to others. We will see the dangers of new teachings that are not based on scripture in its entirety but based on twisting small pieces of scripture and taking them out of context. We will speak the truth in love and will grow to respect one another as we grow together loving Christ as our head. Each member will do their part, trusting everyone else will be doing their part, and the whole of the Church, that is the Body of Christ, will grow and



the devil will hasten to defeat. Friends, we won't stop saying it, preaching it, or teaching it. We are *one church*. We are united in Christ. This is the Church that Jesus is building that the gates of Hell cannot stand against. A mature body of believers who have the wisdom and joy of the Lord and the patience to act when and how the Lord asks.

