

Functioning as One Body

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

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ...

¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until 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.

¹⁴Then 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. ¹⁵Instead, 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. ¹⁶From 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. Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011

Been watching the Olympics? I have. I know teams are competing in behalf of their countries, but they are also competing to win medals for themselves. Most races focus on the individuals. But some races and events depend on a team effort. Relays in swimming and track are like that. So also basketball and synchronized diving. They work together for a common goal.

A congregation functions in the same way. We are not competing individually. In fact, God designed his believers to be social beings who need to be with one another, to encourage or be encouraged by his Word and fellow believers. We we also work together. In our Epistle reading you heard words that describe this working together: one body, joined together, held together, each does his or her work. May the Holy Spirit move us today to recognize the unity we truly have and use it for his Church.

I. What does a functioning body look like?

There is a very important point we must make. We didn't do anything to unite ourselves. This text isn't about how we can bring all of us together. We are already one, made one by the Lord. ***³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*** Did you catch it? It says to "keep the unity" of the Spirit. It already exists.

God brought us together. This Spirit has tied us together with a special kind of rope. It is called peace. This peace starts first between us and God. Together we have all come to realize how lost we really were, and how much we needed rescuing. Sin is rebellion. It doesn't work with God. It resists God. Imagine a relay race. The gun fires and the runner sits down and says, "No. I will not run." The relay team is broke. So is our relationship with God.

But together we watched in amazement God loving us so much that he gave up his one and only Son for us. Together we have seen this Savior dying on the cross to save us. We all have heard his promise that he is preparing a room for us in his mansion and is coming back to take us all there. We have buried loved ones with the sure hope they will rise and be glorified when he comes. Just as the five numbers, "55307," unites us all under the umbrella of Arlington, we and all believers all exist as one body with one Spirit, with the same hope of eternal life. We received the very same baptism. We all are under the one true God and dare to call him Father. The Romans were amazed at how the Christians called themselves brothers and sisters. We are.

Our job is to make every effort to keep that unity of peace. ***¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*** We see four things here that will keep us together as one. The first is humility. A humble person considers everyone else in the room equal, even better than himself. Pride separates. It says I am better than you. Humility says I am not. Gentle. The opposite of gentle is harsh. Gentleness is like picking up a 1,000 year old crystal glass. You handle it very carefully. Even if you are right and the other person is totally wrong, you are gentle. You don't call that person a moron. That will only divide you. He will never listen to you again. Instead you are gentle.

Patience. Patience keeps you from becoming angry. It gives the other person the benefit of doubt. Patience means you don't leave anyone behind. Once when one of my kids was going through the teething process, he bit my finger. I really hurt. But patience doesn't told me to endure the pain as I gently removed my finger from his mouth. So patience is very similar to "bearing with one another in love." What do you do when grandma comes to your house? You offer her an arm and let her lean on you. You take on her weight on yourself. To bear means you carry. We carry each other's burdens; we carry each other's weaknesses. We even patiently endure one's annoying habits.

That is how a unified, functioning body looks. Instead of being torn apart by pride or anger or harshness, or impatience, we bear with each other in love.

II. What are we striving for?

That is something we can do to function as one body. Christ has something that also keeps us together. “ ***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 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.***” Jesus ascended to heaven from where he will soon return. Until then he gives us some special gifts. He first gave us the apostles. He personally chose each apostle. They were taught by the Holy Spirit and when needed inspired by the Spirit to write things down for us. They are the infallible teachers of the Church. And they are still teaching us today as we are built on the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone.

He then gives us prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These are suppose to take what the Apostles and prophets teach us in God’s Word and share them with us “... ***so that the body of Christ may be built up 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.***” You may cheer for the Twins. The family sitting three pews behind you may cheer for the Brewers. But you believe that Baptism is a Means by which God showers his grace on us and forgives our sins in Christ and still serves in our daily struggle against sin and the Old Adam. So does that family three pews behind you. You both believe the same thing because God said so in his Word and someone shared it with you. The Bible unifies us. We want to see, and read and follow everything God says in his Word. We want to know what it teaches, and not just the doctrine of the Trinity, but also in what the Bible teaches about Communion, Baptism, creation, sin, grace, justification, the end times. So are united by the teachings of God’s Word, even those who might root for the Brewers.

We need this. “***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.***” If I told a child that the earth is square, he might believe me. The world wants to teach us all sorts of things, basically how to live like the world. Can this steer us away from Christ, the cross, forgiveness and heaven? You bet.

So we are not blown off course, we learn what God says and teaches so we can hold onto it and disregard anything that contradicts it. As we do, we grow mature. We start off with “Jesus loves me this I know,” but look at you now, recognizing the body and blood of Christ in God’s Word. And each day you mature more and more.

And then we can work together as one. “***7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ...***” Notice Paul says “us.” Each member has gifts from Jesus, ways in which they serve. We try to mimic this here at St. Paul’s. We have called workers and others, as it says, ***12 to equip his people for works of service.***” We organize public worship so you can hear the apostles again. We organize baptisms. We like to do weddings so they can be consecrated by the Word of God. We operate a Lutheran elementary school so we can teach early and often the truths of the Bible. Soon we have to organize our Sunday School for the upcoming year. It all does and should revolve around God’s Word.

But this involves everyone. God has gifted you, too, to serve in one way or other. It is our prayer parents send their kids to Sunday School and or our day school, but these verses tell us that parents don’t just send their kids; they teach and model God’s Word at home, too, for that is their ministry. What if you don’t have kids anymore? You can still support our school, Sunday School, LIMA, the synod to send evangelists. We are looking for Sunday School teachers. We pray for folks in church, but you are praying at home, too. We visit folks in the hospital or nursing home, but it is assumed you do the same. In a few weeks we will discuss the budget. It is a list of all the ministries we conduct here at St. Paul’s and the numbers it might take to carry it out. Even if you don’t take advantage of all St. Paul’s does like Sunday School or MVL or our day school or LIMA, we still support it because it serves others and builds up the body of Christ.

Is any church perfect at living as one body? No, and don’t be surprised. This side of heaven we struggle with temptation and a sinful nature. But thank we don’t have to be perfect because we can’t. What matter is that Jesus is perfect, a perfect death to pay for our sins and a perfect life which we can call our own. We are united with him and one another. Let’s show it as we bear with each other in love, hold to all of the Bible’s teachings so we are not deceived, and find our part of the ministry. Amen.