

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXIV : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:4~6 —

beynge one body and one sprete even as ye are called in one hope of youre callynge. Let ther be but one lorde one fayth one baptism: one god and father of all which is above all thow all and in you all. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

There is one body, and one Spirit, euen as yee are called in one hope of your vocation. There is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptisme, One God and Father of all, which is aboue all, and through all, and in you all. (Geneva Bible, 1599)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (King James Version, 1769)

one body and one Spirit, according as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (Revised Version, 1885)

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all. (American Standard Version, 1901)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (New King James Version, 1982)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (New International Version, 2011)

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (English Standard Version, 2011)

ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν· εἰς κύριος μία πίστις ἐν βάπτισμα εἰς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πάσιν ὑμῖν. (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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PRE-LESSON CONSIDERATIONS

A QUESTION FOR EACH OF US: 'WHAT IS THE BODY OF CHRIST?' — Prior to getting into this morning's lesson proper, I thought it good to make sure we are all on the same page. So there will be no misunderstandings, I would like each of us to answer a question: 'what is the body of Christ?' Answers may vary but the typical responses are one of two things; either,

- *the body of Christ is 'any local gathering of believers,'*

or, most often,

- *'every person who has ever been saved, all of the elect, both in heaven and here on earth.'*

To just clear the air, I want to clarify our thoughts as we begin to look into today's subject. To the question 'what is the body of Christ' I respond as follows:

'The body of Christ is the physical, human body of God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ; who eternally clothed Himself in humanity, was crucified, buried and physically raised out from among the dead; that physical / spiritual risen body ascended into heaven where our Lord Jesus reigns over the entire universe in majesty and glory. That is the body of Christ and the only body of Christ! EVERYTHING ELSE IS A METAPHOR!!!'

That truth should be self-evident but I believe is often overlooked in our thinking or when giving a defense of our own particular belief. ***Being a metaphor (a word picture used to illustrate a given truth), we should also be reminded of something we noticed in earlier lessons: Metaphors may change their application according to the immediate context.***

Allow me to partially quote from lesson 13h on Ephesians 2:20 where we discussed this issue:

THE FOUNDATION IS NOT CHRIST BUT THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS — on the foundation of the apostles and prophets — “Like all buildings the edifice of v. 20 has a foundation. In 1 Cor 3.10 it is Jesus Christ and it is laid by Paul, not God. It is possible to take a similar meaning here and see the apostles and prophets as those who lay the foundation, so NEB ‘built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets’; this is changed in REB to the more correct ‘the foundation of the apostles and prophets’. In v. 20 Christ, a person, is one stone in the building and it is difficult to see the apostles and prophets as those who built him in; only the desire to harmonize v. 20 with 1 Cor 3.10 could have led to the NEB translation.... *[T]here is no reason why [Paul] should not have modified his use of the building metaphor from 1 Cor 3.10; authors regularly vary their use of metaphors.*” [Best, 280f] *“These changes in metaphor are no argument in themselves for diversity of authorship; metaphors may be altered to emphasize this or that lesson.”* [Bruce, 304] Most of those I studied teach Paul is speaking of the apostles and prophets as the foundation:

“They are *built on the foundation*, — they are founded on the doctrine, *of the apostles and prophets.*” [Calvin, Ephesians]

“The foundation which consists of them [i.e., the apostles and prophets]; in the sense that their doctrine is the basis of the faith, and so of the unity, of the saints.” [Moule, 83]

“[The apostles and prophets] form a single foundation because they first proclaimed the gospel to the Gentiles.” [Thielman, 180]

“[T]he apostles and prophets are themselves the foundation. It is true that elsewhere, with the exception of Rev. xxi. 14, Christ is the foundation, not the apostles; but here Christ is the corner-stone, and the passage in Rev., although not precisely parallel, quite justifies our interpretation here.” [Abbott, 71] *{end of quote from previous lesson}*

‘According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’ — 1 Cor 3:10,11

‘having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’ — Eph 2:20

WE ALL BELIEVE IN TWO ENTITIES — for further clarification:

<i>As soon as we trust Jesus Christ as our Savior, we become part of a new entity.</i>	<i>After becoming part of the first entity, it is the emphasis of the New Testament Scriptures to become part of this second entity.</i>
<i>This entity is spiritual and invisible.</i>	<i>This entity is physical and visible.</i>
<i>Those who are a part of this entity are part of it forever.</i>	<i>This entity is constrained by the limits of time and this physical life.</i>
<i>Belonging to this entity has to do with one’s justification (salvation).</i>	<i>Belonging to this entity has to do with one’s sanctification and was provided by our Lord Jesus Christ as a means to aid our spiritual growth.</i>
<i>All who are a part of this entity will go to heaven, regardless of whether they are ever baptized or become part of a church.</i>	<i>While all of this entity’s members are supposed to be saved, there are those as tares mingled among the wheat, acting like true believers but never having been born again into God’s kingdom. Membership in this entity does not guarantee heaven.</i>
<i>Some refer to this entity as ‘the universal–invisible church;’ I prefer to call it the family of God: ‘For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.’ (Gal 3:26 NKJV)</i>	<i>The Scripture speaks of this entity as the ecclesia; today we know it as the local church.</i>

I personally would never refer to the first entity as the ‘universal-invisible church’ but regardless of what we call it, we all believe in the same two things above. I see no reason to cause division between the brethren about semantics.

THE CURSE OF SINFUL BIAS — Another problem all humans have as we approach the Scriptures is our own sinful bias. This is different with us all but is present nevertheless. The best approach is to recognize that we have this bias and try our best to minimize its effects.

To admit my bias: I acknowledge my bias; in fact, I advertise it with every lesson: *‘Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis.’* I admittedly look at every passage relating to the ecclesia (church) with a pre-disposed bias that Paul is referring to the local church. I do this for two reasons. First, because of my own studies regarding the nature of the church. From lesson 1:

Ecclesia was a Common Word — When Christ spoke “*Upon this rock I will build My ecclesia*” He was using a term familiar to each disciple. “*The New Testament writers neither coined this word nor employed it in an unusual sense.* The apostles and early Christians were more familiar with the Septuagint than with the Hebrew Version. From it they generally quoted. They wrote in Greek to a Greek-speaking world, and used Greek words as a Greek-speaking people would understand them.... [It is] fiction that *Ecclesia* was used in any new, special sense. *The object of Christ’s ecclesia, and terms of membership in it, were indeed different from those of the classic or Septuagint ecclesia. But the word itself retains its ordinary meaning.* In determining this meaning we look to the common, literal usage. If occasionally we find it used in a general or figurative way, these few instances must be construed in harmony with the common, literal signification.” [Carroll, *Ecclesia*] “Thus, although ἐκκλησία [ecclesia] is from the very first a secular and worldly expression, it expresses the supreme claim of the Christian community in face of the world.” [Kittel, *Dictionary*]

In its most basic sense, ecclesia may be defined as follows: “***Originally an assembly of citizens, regularly summoned.***” [Vincent, *Word Studies*] The ancient Greek nation was composed of a number of small city-states embracing usually but a few thousand inhabitants. It was governed by the qualified citizens; i.e. they were autonomous and democratic. Not all the inhabitants however possessed the rights of citizenship (in some cases scarcely half) so the matter of qualification was quite important. This body of citizens *called-out* to assemble and discuss civic affairs was a Greek *ecclesia* (a NT example of that may be found in Acts 19). Therefore when the Lord Jesus used this word, He used it in the sense commonly understood by those with whom He was talking. In essence what Jesus said was this: “*The Greek Gentiles have their assemblies which regularly meet to discuss things of a secular nature. I too will start and build My own ecclesia, an assembly of believers which will meet on a regular basis, not to discuss secular matters nor for social purposes but to honor and glorify My name. This assembly will be built using you apostles as the foundation (it is with you I will begin) and hell itself will not destroy this program — when I return, there will still be those assemblies meeting for My name’s sake.*” **Thus during His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ started a work which continues to this day.**

H. E. Dana, Greek scholar, co-author of an advance Greek grammar and professor of NT Interpretation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote this concerning the Greek background of ecclesia: “***It was commonly used in reference to bodies of qualified representatives ‘called out’ for legislative purposes.... When this governing body of those who held the qualifications of citizenship assembled for deliberative purposes they were known as an ecclesia. In its bearing upon the New Testament idea of the church the important significance of the classical usage is that the term referred to a body of persons having definite qualifications, assembled to carry out certain organized aims on democratic principles. To be more specific, there were in the classical usage of this term four elements pertinent to its New Testament meaning: (1) the assembly was local; (2) it was autonomous; (3) it presupposed definite qualifications; (4) it was conducted on democratic principles.***” [Dana, *Ecclesia*] *{end of quote from previous lesson}*

My second reason was best summarized by our Pastor: ‘*Regardless of how we think of the word church today, the only meaning to the early Christians was that of the local assembly.*’ We can see that is true from the above definitions. His comment is an astute observation and one in which I am in total agreement.

While I admit my bias and while I wish I did not have to make this a matter of concern, I am also not embarrassed about it. It is part of being human. *And as I admit my own frailty in this area, I would like to remind the reader of their own pre-disposed bias. While I am looking at each of these Ephesian passages with a local-church pre-disposition, most look at these same passages with a universal church pre-disposition. Some may have reached that conclusion from their personal studies but I believe most have that predisposition merely because it is so prevalently taught and the local church interpretation may have never been explained to them. (Side note: as I study Ephesians from the standpoint of the local church, I must admit great satisfaction with what I have studied so far. It bolsters my belief that Paul was indeed referring to the local church in his letter.)*

OUR MUTUAL PRAYER — Recognizing our frailties, we should pray one for another.

- ***May we recognize and admit our predispositions.*** Recognition is a big factor in this; many of our predispositions are totally innocent and present with us merely because we live in a different culture 2000 years after the New Testament was written. When we read a passage, our thoughts naturally coincide with that which we are familiar (for example, as an early believer I was ignorant of the significance of ‘unwalled cities’ in the Old Testament). **May we be students of the Word to understand what it meant to those to whom it was written.**
- ***May we be honest with ourselves before God to surrender our pre-disposition when shown to be an error.*** That is not as easy as it may sound.
- ***May we be respectful with those who disagree.*** While I disagree with the universal church application to these passages in question, it must be remembered that we all hold to the same truths about the above two entities. Whatever someone will claim about the universal invisible church, I would make the same claim about the family of God. And I have never met a universal invisible church proponent who also did not recognize the local assembly of believers, to one degree or another. So in all matters of importance, we are in agreement and any ‘lack of agreement’ is merely a matter of semantics. *The ones to whom I have great disagreement are those who deny the importance of the local church because of their supposed-membership in the universal invisible church. Those taking the teaching to that degree hinders their own spiritual growth as well as those they may influence.*



THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY — Paul had just expressed the unity of those within the Lord’s congregations by using the term ‘the unity of the Spirit.’ He now emphasizes that unity through a series of seven acclamations of oneness. These seven acclamations fall into two groups of three, concluding with an acclamation of the one God with its own fourfold repetition of the word ‘all.’

ONE BODY — ἓν σῶμα [hen sōma]

‘ONE BODY’ UNDERSTOOD BY ALL TO BE THE CHURCH — Whatever differences believers may have as to what Paul is referring, all are united in believing this to be a reference to the church. *“The first phrase ‘one body’ recalls 2.16; Col 3.15; Rom 12.5, and there can be no doubt that [Paul] understands it to refer to the church and not to the Eucharistic or physical body of Christ.* It suitably heads the list since what follows relates to the church and life within it. Normally when [Paul] speaks of the body he makes a close reference, if not a direct one, to Christ, so that the body is identifiable as his (cf 1.23; 2.16; 4.12, 16; 5.23, 30); the absence of such a reference here probably arises from the use of tradition.” [Best, 366f]

NOT AN EXHORTATION BUT A DECLARATION — *The unity Paul is expressing is a unity based upon truth. ‘One body...’ is not an exhortation but a declaration. “The meaning is not, ‘Let us be united in one body,’ or in soul and body; but, as the context requires, it is a simple declaration.”* [Hodge, 143]

BODY = NOT JUST UNION BUT ENERGY + OPERATION — “Here as always the imagery of the Body suggests not only union but united energy and operation. Its frequent recurrence emphasizes its importance and significance. Vital union with Christ, by the Spirit, is the one true secret of holy growth and action, alike for the individual and the community. The ‘one’ is highly emphatic.” [Moule, 104f]

ADMITTEDLY MOST APPLY THIS TO THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH — It would not be a problem showing those who believe this body to be the universal-invisible church:

“The sevenfold use of ‘one’ emphasizes unity. First, there is one body, which refers to the universal church already discussed (1:23; 2:16; 3:5-6). Briefly, this consists of the body of believers, an entirely new concept in the NT, never envisioned in the OT.” [Hoehner, 514]

“One body. One mystical body of Christ (the spiritual church or kingdom, cf. 1:23; 2:16).” [Robertson, Word Pictures]

“The body is the invisible Church, the mystical body of Christ.” [Vincent, Word Studies]

“There are not several bodies of Christ in different locales, but one body of Christ, and each local congregation is representative of that body. Behind the one body — one Spirit language is the theology of 2:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, in which Christians are joined into one body by the Spirit and given access together to God.” [Snodgrass, 198]

Other quotes could easily be multiplied but this should suffice. I am not trying to say there are no proponents of this ‘body’ as being the universal-invisible church; quite the opposite. But I do question whether that interpretation fits the context.

DOES THE UNIVERSAL-INVISIBLE CHURCH FIT THE CONTEXT? — If one accepts the universal-invisible church interpretation of this passage, then what exactly is Paul saying? What are we to get out of this passage?

To those with the universal-invisible church interpretation Paul means the following:

one body = all believers, the universal-invisible church

one Spirit, one hope, one Lord = no real disagreement on these points

one faith = as we will see in later lessons, it is difficult to decide whether Paul is referring to the faith as our body of doctrine or the faith of our salvation. Most of those taking the universal-invisible church interpretation typically lean towards the ‘faith’ being that which was exercised at salvation since that would go hand-in-hand with their incorporation into the invisible body of Christ.

one baptism = the universal-invisible church people again says this refers to the moment of salvation when we were ‘spiritually baptized into that one universal-invisible body of Christ.’

Let us tie this together then with what we have studied so far in this chapter:

“Live worthily of the calling with which you were called,

with humility, gentleness, patience,

bearing with one another in love,

striving and being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond which is peace.’

If we accept the universal–invisible church interpretation given above, then what is Paul saying? Why are we to strive and work zealously to maintain the unity? *“Because all believers are united with one another in one spiritual church. We are all brothers and sisters. We are all saved by the same faith. We are all baptized into one spiritual body. THEREFORE we are to strive to keep the unity with one another, to keep peace with one another. We are to bear with believers regardless of temporal physical differences such as denominations and doctrine.”* **If Paul’s emphasis here is upon the spiritual unity found in the universal–invisible church, then how are we to argue against ecumenism? Are we wrong to place doctrine above unity? Are we wrong to fight to keep our church autonomous?”**

But if Paul’s emphasis is upon the local assembly of believers (the definition of the ecclesia), then Paul is saying we are to strive to keep the peace and unity with one another within our own local body. This is a much more difficult command than to keep the unity with the spiritual family of God, most of whom we will never meet this side of eternity and most of whom we will never have to rub shoulders. As was quoted in our first lesson:

“For many [the local church] is all too literal and imperfect and visible. It is much easier to live in a dream church than in a real one.” [B. H. Kazee, *The Church and the Ordinances*]

THE CHURCH IS NOT OURS TO RE-DEFINE — *The New Testament tells us how the ecclesia is to function. We are not at liberty to re-define the church but rather we are under obligation to make sure our churches operate as close as possible to the precepts as set forth in the Scriptures.* “Applying it as we may and must to the time institution he established, it overturns the claims of all human institutions affecting equality with God’s institution, or assuming the right to be recognized as a branch thereof. Applying it as we may, and as Paul does, to a particular church, the only expression of the institution, it excludes all so called churches not modeled after the New Testament pattern in its terms of membership, polity, doctrines, ordinances, and officers.” [Carroll, 142]

WHAT PAUL WRITES TO ONE ECCLESIA HE WRITES TO ALL EACH — “The unity of the Spirit is maintained as the members of the body function together harmoniously for the well-being of the whole. This is taught in 1 Cor. 12:12-26 in relation to the local church; here the principle is applied more generally. It was, in any case, never envisaged as applicable to one local church only: *wherever the people of Christ were found, there was his body*, of which they were individually members.” [Bruce, 336] Excellent comments from F. F. Bruce, who is a strong believer in the universal–invisible church.