

EPHESIANS #54 4:4 1-20-13

ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT

(Ephesians 4) When my wife and I went to Eastern Europe in 2005 we were encouraged to do certain things, like walk through a Ukrainian marketplace, in order to have what is called a cross-cultural experience. Things like that get you educated to the differences that exists across cultures, differences in habit, in outlook and lifestyle. For instance, in the Ukrainian market I saw a woman in the meat market chewing on a hunk of uncooked, pig fat. They call it “salo” and it is a common enjoyment for them, but something we would be reluctant to let our dogs do in this country. I have a book about missions that tells of different forms of greetings across the world. You know, some groups shake hands, others hug or kiss, or bow. My favorite is practiced among the Siriano tribe of South America where the men greet other men by spitting on each other’s chests. I thought that sounded pretty cool and probably more sanitary than shaking hands. But what would happen if some dear Siriano brother came into our church and started spitting on all the men? Would you guys be offended or would you say, “Thanks, Lord, for this opportunity to apply Ephesians 4:2-3”, huh? That’s the passage we looked at last week. It calls us to preserve our spiritual unity with diligence, treating each other with humility and patience. We spoke of how unity is a delicate thing because of the great differences among us and because we are sinners. As you recall I offered seven guidelines for preserving spiritual unity and I could have given more if time allowed. I could have said that we should think often on our great bonds of unity. ® In any group or relationship the thing that makes for a sense of unity and commonality is a mutual interest, or experience, a mutual love or hate. You look at who your friends are and you should be able to identify what those relational bonds are for you. Maybe a common hobby or position in life, or personal interest. These form the ground of your unity. Well, in our text for today we are going to learn the grounds for unity among followers of Christ, the things that bind us together and make spiritual oneness and church unity a possibility **1-6** *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* There in verses 4-6 you have the seven bonds of Christian unity. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father. Man alive, can you imagine seven more

powerful cords of unity? Hobbies and the like are nothing compared to these. If these truths got under our skin it would be like an explosion in a glue factory. Petty differences of race, and background and social status would matter nothing at all. Whether you shake, kiss or spit would be “no importa.” All that would matter is the sharing of these seven awesome bonds. These form the ground of our unity. Our oneness is not built on sentimental talk of peace and unity, but on solid biblical truth. These things makes us one and the better we grasp them the less chance there is of the devil splitting us up.

Today we’ll look at the first two of these bonds, those supplied to us in verse 4 *There is one body and one Spirit*. The first one reminds believers that they are of one body. They are a part of a group for which Christ has died and into which Christ has brought them. The New Testament constantly presents our salvation in this way, as something that is corporate in nature, and there is something very instructive for us right there. It’s time we dumped this concept of the Lone Christian once and for all. Nowhere is the Lone Christian fallacy so popular as it is here in the land of the free and the home of the brave. We are the nation of independence and it affects our religion as well. You hear people speak often of their spiritual life being a private matter. It’s really a way of ending a discussion one isn’t comfortable with. “My faith is a very personal, private thing.” When I hear that anymore I conclude that a private faith is the same as no faith at all. Do you see from our passage that being a Christian is not a private thing at all? We’ll see even more in the weeks ahead, but just the notion of being part of the body should obliterate such thinking.

Can you see what I am holding here? (a hand). Yes, it is a hand. What good is it? Huh? What can you do with a hand like this one that is severed from the body? Maybe use it as a paperweight, or maybe a doorstop. But basically, a solitary hand isn’t worth much is it? But, you link this hand to a living human body and it can perform live-saving surgery, or play beautiful music or express love to a child. Body parts cut off from the body are a major waste. They have no life. Stephen Wright is a comedian who specializes in the bizarre. He says, *I saw a man with a wooden leg and a real foot*. That thought wrinkles your brain because you can’t have a living foot attached to wood. It has to be attached to the body. Got it? God’s word tells believers in Jesus that we are all part of the body of Jesus and so we can do great things when we are connected. We are intimately tied together, like the leg is tied to the foot or your shoulders to your arms. It is a seamless and organic unity. If you are a Christian you are part of the body. Do you see yourself in that way? Do you think of yourself as part of the body of Christ? Are you quick to identify with your church? Are you someone whose

lifestyle displays the connectedness of Christ's body, so that the church is at the center of what you do and who you are? That's the way the Lord intends it to be, but I'm afraid many of you continue to miss this. Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus are operating outside the orbit of the church. People decide to marry, get called to the mission field, and even prepare to go without ever consulting church leaders. These could be very spiritual people but it doesn't cross their minds that the church has any place in decisions like that. Church may be seen by you as something you do, something you fit into your schedule when things are going smoothly, but its hardly a major dimension of your existence. For some of you it's a priorities problem. You really know better; but for others it's more a failure of understanding. You haven't ever perceived the communal dimension of Christian faith and life. I remember a conversation I had with a young man who told me that he didn't sign the attendance register when it went down his row because it is nobody's business what his name is. And he was a very serious Christian, but a confused one. We are to see ourselves as part of a whole and realize that really nothing is private and that everything we do affects others. I forget who it was, but I heard a speaker recently tell of his visit to China where he met with a group of twenty or so Chinese students. He asked these students to share with him what it is they wanted to do with their lives, and he was astonished at what he heard. You ask American students that question and you'll get twenty different answers from soup to nuts. But in this group everyone of the students replied by saying, "I just want to do whatever is in the best interest of my country." Interesting huh? Now, granted, there may be a different problem among that group but do you see how out of balance we are in the opposite direction? Here everything is the individual. Everything centers around me doing my thing, expressing myself, fulfilling my dreams. But Jesus says we are one body. Have we made room for that in our thinking? Have we come to see ourselves in that way?

The language of the New Testament about our salvation brings this out as well. When 3000 people came to faith in Jesus on the day of Pentecost it says they were added to the church. Interesting the language. It doesn't say that 3000 were born-again, or 3000 made a decision for Christ. The language is church-centric. 3000 were added to the church. In speaking of the Spirit's work in I Corinthians 12, we read this in verse **13** *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* The One Spirit makes those He touches into one body. **12** *For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is*

Christ. The Body image communicates unity. We are as tied together as our body parts. And that is a pretty tight unity. I heard that someone found a hair that belonged to Ludwig Van Beethoven who died in 1827 and with that hair, scientists were able to determine the state of his health at the time of death. I found this incredible; but they claim they already ruled out syphilis as the cause of death and they would be testing that hair for other things. You see, because the body is one, the chemical makeup of that hair is going to be identical to that of other body parts. That is how united Christians are said to be. But, just as in a body, a person's hair and a person's knees are also very different aren't they? Very different. So, a body is famous for displaying a unity in diversity. Unity in diversity. You look on your coins and what does it say? *E Pluribus Unum*. That's a Latin term meaning "From the Many One." From the many one. It is descriptive of our country, although not so much as it used to be, but it is also descriptive of the church. In the church there is a unity without uniformity. Like the hair and the knee, the hand and the eye, we are very different from each other, but there is an underlying unity that links us together. That's what it means to be one Body. And there is only one Body of Christ. Individual churches become small expressions of that one body, but when I say, "we are the body of Christ" I don't mean it is limited to us right here. The Body is trans-denominational, trans-continental, and even trans-generational. In this one body you find people from many different sects, many different nations and many different ages. The point of our text is that with all of these, not just your group, with all these we are to keep the peace as an expression of our organic spiritual unity. We are one body.

As a practical application of this, I invite your attention to our screen where you will see a diagram out of Rick Warren's book "The Purpose Driven Church." It depicts what Warren calls the five circles of commitment. Going from the outside in there is the community which refers to those who don't do church at all, then the crowd, by which he means the regular attendees at church, then inside that is the congregation or the members of the church, inside that are the committed, that is the maturing members, and then at the center is the core of the church, those who are thoroughly engaged with the body, truly giving, truly serving in a significant way. I have added one more circle in the middle. One more point. That is Christ. And as we move further in, as we grow in our connections with the church, we become closer and closer to the Christ Himself who gave His life for the church. Today, my challenge is this – locate yourself on this chart, and then make a commitment today to move one or even two circles closer. Can you do that? Do you have sufficient reason from God's word to do that?

We have more to cover today. We look now at the second of the seven bonds of unity in Ephesians four. Paul says, “There is one body and one Spirit.” He could have said that there is one body because there is one Spirit. The Spirit of God, whom the Bible describes as a divine personality, part of the Holy Trinity, is the One who places us and joins us in the one body. The Holy Spirit is the One who changes our hearts so that that we come to hate our sin and trust in Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s work is essential and powerful and transforming. Okay? Now look - if the apostle points to the One Spirit as a point of commonality among us, then surely we have to reject the notion that among real followers of Jesus there are the spiritual haves and the spiritual have-nots. This is one of those intramural debates among believers, but you may have heard this in some form or another - that some Christians have the Holy Spirit and some don’t. Or some are baptized by the Spirit and some are not. You hear this distinction between the Spirit-filled and the Spirit-less, as if there are two distinct classes in the church. No No. In the Lord’s church we are all one. We don’t divide ourselves into these kind of classes. We leave that to the airlines. Tim Hawkins has a funny sketch on this and I thought it would be fun to take a minute and see it. (show 65 sec clip from Insanitized) Here is what I hope you understand – on the Jesus flight everybody goes first class. We all get the steak dinner and the champagne. I Corinthians 12:13 again **13a** *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.* The notion that there are members of the church who are filled with, baptized by or anointed in the Holy Spirit while others are not completely contradicts this teaching of the Lord. The Spirit of God is not the possession of just some members of the body. Romans 8:9 *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.* That’s plain enough isn’t it? If we are to make a distinction among Christians, the proper one to make is not between the plain and the turbo Christian but between the real and the phony.

Part of what has led to this unbiblical distinction some are making, is a recognition that lots of folks in the church neither look nor sound like a person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. What do we make of them? I read of Tai Collins a former Miss Virginia who had a little fling with a US senator and then posed nude for Playboy. And I did not read about her in Playboy. We thought of showing you her picture but we couldn’t find anything appropriate. In an interview she did, she spoke fondly of the Presbyterian church she recently joined and when asked if her “modeling” would be a problem there she said, “I don’t think so. I mean lots of people in my church have been in Playboy.” Great! I bet that church has an interesting pictorial directory. Are these the folks with whom we share one Spirit? I mean, they are members in the church. Some church anyway. Didn’t I

just say that all church members have the Holy Spirit? No, I didn't. I said every member of the body of Christ has the Spirit, but there are lots of church members – meaning those who are on the roll of or participate in an ecclesiastical institution - who aren't body members. In Romans 9:6 Paul says, “not all Israel is Israel.” The same thing applies here. There are members of the visible church, the organization we call the church, who are not part of the spiritual body of the Lord. Lots of times, because of their upbringing, their learned traditions, their emotional or relational needs folks get swept into the church with no operation of the Spirit in their lives at all. They find church a nice thing, have no real objection to what they hear taught, and so they stay around even though the substance of true biblical faith is foreign to them. Such as these are not included in this unity. The Oneness we are talking about is among those who are made one body by the work of the One Spirit who indwells us and controls us and makes us what He is. And what is He? What is this Spirit? We commonly call Him the Holy Spirit. And the word *holy* includes the concepts of purity and righteousness.

Listen, there are plenty of evil spirits out there. But there is only one Holy Spirit and when you discover Him at work in a life or in a church, there you have sufficient basis for acceptance and fellowship. Since I lived in the same community all my growing up years, I have friends with whom I went to school from first grade right through twelfth grade. Some very close. Some not-so-much. One of the not-so-much friends of mine was a guy named Toby. Toby and I were around each other a lot but never really seemed to click. I don't think he liked my humor, which I am sure you find hard to imagine. Toby, by the way, drove a distinct-looking yellow Volvo. So, I go off to college and get involved in a lovely Evangelical Free church which I greatly appreciated and where I met my wife. Then I go off to seminary. But one summer, when I was back home doing youth ministry I ran into somebody who reported to me that Toby had started going to my college church and had met Jesus there. Well, I was thrilled with that news, and just a week or so after hearing it I was driving past a local bank and I see a yellow Volvo which made me think of Toby. Then I see a young man walking toward the car with his head down. So I pull into the bank and discover that sure enough it was Toby, the new friend of Jesus. Here is what happened. I pulled up next to him, got out of my car and immediately Toby smiles at me, I smile at him and we spontaneously and joyfully embraced each other. Toby and I had been around each other all our lives, but now we shared something so deep and precious that it made us one. We shared the same Holy Spirit who had taught our hearts the love of Jesus. There, indeed, you must have fellowship. You cannot snub

someone who shares the same Spirit with you, even if he spits on you when he says, “hi.” There is a powerful oneness there that demands to be recognized even against the forces that divide. This was the same struggle they had in the early church when Gentiles started getting saved. The Jewish believers weren’t sure what to make of this. In Acts 10 Peter preaches in the house of Cornelius, an Italian Gentile, and as he does the Spirit of God falls upon those who heard the word. It says the Jewish guys were freaking out because God gave His Holy Spirit to Gentiles. What does God think He is doing!? They didn’t expect God would do this kind of thing. And they wrestled with what to make of it. Now look at verse 27 where Peter speaks and says Acts 10:47 *Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?* You catch the tone of that? Peter expected opposition to receiving Gentiles into the church. And he got plenty of opposition, but what was his answer? The Spirit. God gave them the same Spirit. He is the ground of our oneness and when that is our bond then who cares what divides us? The principle of unity is more powerful than anything else can be. I remember applying for a job as youth pastor at a certain church. This was eighty years ago. The process had gone very smoothly until the pastor gave me one of those personality tests. He graded it himself and then said, “I don’t think I can work with you.” I didn’t have the right personality for him. I was dismayed. I admit the value of those tests; I think they can be helpful, but I was left asking, “Where does the Holy Spirit come in?” Our background, education, heritage, race, and personality may all divide us, but the Spirit of God is greater than all of that. No, you don’t lose your personality in a fundamental sense when you become a Christian but you are certainly not ruled by it. The wealthy, healthy Harvard-educated American man who loves Jesus has more in common with a poor, handicapped Chinese little girl who loves Jesus than he does with the other wealthy, healthy American success next door who doesn’t. Why? The One Spirit who gives us life, who makes us holy, who puts us in the body is the most powerful unifying force in the world. Nothing else matters. Nothing else compares.

Wow! We are just getting started in our march thru this magnificent list. The bonds of Christian oneness. We are one body. One Spirit. How do we express that? Among churches I think occasional interdenominational events give us a way to do that. Working together in joint projects in the community is a way to do that. You see churches coming together to support ministries like Women’s Choice Network and the Coalition for Christian Outreach. That is terrific and positive. I hear people talking about how different churches and denominations don’t like each other. That is not my personal experience at all. I have enjoyed trans-denominational and inter-congregational

fellowship my entire pastoring life. Mostly though, the unity that we seek is an attitude. The expression comes out in our relationships with those believers who are not a part of our particular group and with those who are. Do we look at fellow-believers and see that we are brothers, we are sisters and that we share some commonalities more powerful even than blood? The more we come to appreciate the gospel, what a mutual commitment to Jesus as King and Savior means, what being joined in one body means, what sharing in the same Holy Spirit means the more we will find ourselves drawn to and appreciative of our brothers and sisters in Jesus. We are one body. We share one Spirit. Let's then endeavor to preserve the unity that the Spirit brings in the bonds of our peace.