

The bodybuilding church

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[0 : 00] The first thing I want to explain that this was a multi-dimensional problem, saying that it was not as simple as the children didn't have enough food and you just needed to give them more to eat.

No, there's more to it than that. Among other things, good cooking facilities and clean water must be made available. So that healthy food can be prepared.

Hygiene education has to be given and families trained in child caring practices. Information on where to go for assistance must be provided.

Basically, for the child's body to be nourished and grow well, everybody has a part to play. From the parents, to the community, to the governmental bodies.

Now in one sense, that's the same with the church body too. How is the church body going to be nourished and grow? How do we make sure that we are not to be stunted?

[1 : 14] Well, as one body, we all have a part to play. From the pastor, to small group member, to Sunday school child. That's what we'll see later on in today's passage.

But first, let's get our bearings in Ephesians. So far, the stress has been all about what God has done. So if you were to go back and read Ephesians chapter 1 to 3 for yourself, you will actually struggle to find any commands or instructions there.

There might be one or two, but that's it. It's all about what God has done. And here's his master plan. He's given birth and breathed new life into his church body, which he calls his new humanity. He saved us by grace, remaking and blessing us. It's first and foremost about what God has done, before it's about what we do for God.

The gospel always comes first. So don't miss that. But now the question is, how are we to walk as this new humanity?

[2 : 33] This now becomes the overriding concern of Ephesians chapter 4 to 6. If Ephesians 1 to 3 is all about what God has done, Ephesians 4 to 6 is about how we should respond as a result of what God has done.

Look at Ephesians chapter 4 verse 1. As a prisoner for the Lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

And actually, the word translated live in the New International Version is literally the word walk. The NIV usually translates it as live, just simply to get the underlying meaning.

But let me just show you how our walk with God as his new humanity is post-major concern in the second half of Ephesians.

And I'm just going to use the English Standard Version, which makes this clearer. Next slide, please. In chapter 4 verse 1. Next slide. Paul says, In chapter 5 verse 2.

[3 : 55] In 5 verse 8 he says, In 5 verse 8 he says, In 5 verse 15 he says, So you can see that chapter 4 verse 1 serves as the headline for the remainder of Ephesians.

Paul wants to show us how to walk as God's new humanity. Now next week, Dr. Humpak will I'm sure get especially practical as he helps us to see how we should walk in the areas of speech and relationships in particular.

But this week, Paul wants us to understand how we should walk in such a way that it contributes to the growth, not stunting, of the church body.

You can go to the next slide, Mabel. And remember, I can't stress this enough. He does this in the context of having exposed us to the wonders of how God has chosen us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and given us his Holy Spirit through the gospel in chapters 1 to 3.

This is gospel-centered teaching. And there are two things in particular that Paul wants to say to us this morning. Firstly, keep the unity of the Spirit for there is one body.

[5 : 30] That's the main instruction he wants to give us in our first section in verses 1 to 6. It's right there in verse 3. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Now look carefully at how this unity is described. Notice that it is a God-given unity, not a human-manufactured unity.

We don't create this unity the way Tourism Malaysia does with their billboards of different smiling faces, linking hands together while proclaiming, welcome to Malaysia.

It's not a unity based on outrage, like when certain Angkor judges decided that chicken rendang should be crispy and the whole country rose in protest.

That kind of unity is either an illusion or temporary. This is the unity of the Spirit. This is the unity that we've already heard about back in Ephesians chapter 2, where we have been made one new humanity by the death and resurrection of Christ.

[6 : 45] This is the unity that the Holy Spirit has given to us because he gave both Jews and Gentiles access cards to the throne room of God the Father.

In other words, this unity is a gift of God, genuine and permanent. And if it's a God-given gift, then we need to look after this unity well.

We can't create it, but we can keep it. We can maintain it. We are to safeguard this unity with the same thoughtful care that we give when we're on babysitting duties for our best friend's child.

Notice that Paul says, make every effort. The ESV says, be eager. Now, if I'm honest, that's certainly not my attitude towards maintaining unity in the body.

If I were Paul, I might have written, do the bare minimum. clench your teeth while keeping the unity. Because keeping unity is hard work.

[8 : 03] It's a nice idea in the abstract, but not so easy to do in real life. After all, just look at the character of this unity in verse 2.

Be completely humble and gentle. be patient, bearing with one another in love. How should you keep this unity?

Well, be completely humble. In other words, be willing to crucify your pride. That's how you do it. By being ready to take constructive criticism.

By not needing to be praised in public for what you do. by not thinking of yourselves as indispensable to a particular ministry. You see, when we don't crucify our pride, it leads to disunity. Because if we resent the criticism, if we desire the praise and want to feel important above everything else, it does something bad to our hearts.

[9 : 13] We begin to feel like we should have been treated better. And so we might become bitter and fixated on ourselves, not others.

We become more inclined to indulge ourselves rather than pay attention to the genuine needs of others. We no longer become gentle for we more easily put others down rather than be gracious to them.

If we are not humble, we will end up breaking the Spirit's unity, that bond of peace rather than keeping it. But Paul says, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.

That's what we are to pursue. We are to practice daily a denial of self. We are to consider others. being humble.

It might mean going out of your way to help another person that you wouldn't ordinarily give a thought to. It might mean considering the opinion of a person whom you normally think is silly in his or her suggestions.

[10 : 33] And if every Christian began thinking like that and acting like that, well, that church is going to find it easier to maintain its unity, its togetherness.

But it requires patience. The patience described here is not simply the patience you are trying to exercise while waiting for that Ed Sheeran concert to arrive.

It's the patience that is sometimes called forbearance. It's the bearing with one another in love when you are ready to overlook someone's weaknesses or shortcomings, his awkward personality, her slowness to understand things, and so on.

It's actually the patience God showed for his people when they rejected him for the thousand time, when they said they wanted Egypt, not the promised land, when the disciples just don't get a single parable that Jesus tells.

God's will need to walk. God's new humanity, and that's costly.

[12:00] I know that even as I just preach those words to you, that I need to preach it to myself too. You and I will fail often. And when that happens, we need to rush back to the cross.

But even as we find forgiveness there, we remember afresh that this is what we are called to. We are to keep the unity of the spirit. And to strengthen our resolve, Paul now goes on to give us the basis for that unity, verses 4 to 6.

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. You see, we are one body, not two, not three. And that one body is anchored in the deepest reality in the universe.

It's anchored in God the Trinity, the Father, the Son, that's the Lord Jesus and one spirit. Our unity, our oneness is not based merely on something like the fact that we're into photography or we support Liverpool or our families all come from the same kampong.

[13:23] Our oneness is based on what God the Trinity has done through the gospel. That's why there is only one faith because there is only one way to know God and be part of this new humanity by bowing the knee to the one and only Lord Jesus Christ.

There isn't one kind of faith for the Jew and another kind of faith for the Gentile. It isn't as if there are different baptisms for South Africans and Brazilians and Koreans.

If we are Christians we subscribe to the same gospel and are baptized by the same spirit into the same faith.

And that's important because it helps us see that God does not call us to a lowest denominator kind of unity. In other words verses 4 to 6 show that we never do unity for unity's sake alone.

That's a common mistake in our circles. We say oh we should be united but we never work out what the center of our unity is.

[14:42] And our unity has to be centered on the gospel. So that means if someone claims to be Christian but does not accept the fundamental truths of the gospel we cannot by definition be united to them.

So we can't take part in the same evangelistic programs as Roman Catholics for example as long as the gospel they proclaim includes a very different understanding of justification by faith.

It means that if we are invited to participate in an interfaith prayer service for example simply on the grounds that it shows that we are a harmonious society we have to politely decline because we will have no agreement on who we are praying to what we are praying for and on whose terms we are praying and indeed if we accept the invitation we actually obscure the gospel because we make it less clear to the watching world that there is only one God one Lord one spirit and indeed only one hope and by declining such an invitation we are actually being honest and respectful of the real differences that exist between different religions rather than pretending that they're all the same we can keep dialoguing in a civilized manner with them maintaining our unity in the spirit and seeking to uphold true tolerance in our society doesn't have to be incompatible but to keep the unity of the spirit we must never remove the gospel to do otherwise is to stunt the growth of the body so that's the first thing Paul wants to say keep keep the unity of the spirit for there is one body here's the second build towards maturity in the body by being equipped for ministry build towards maturity in the body by being equipped for ministry the goal of every church is clearly stated in verse 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 that's what we're aiming for we don't want stunted churches but well nourished and mature ones we want to be people who love Jesus and know his word inside out we no longer verse 14 want to 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 but the question is how do we get there well in the second section of our passage Paul tells us about the roles of three different parties and how they each contribute towards attaining our goal Christ himself the ministers of the word and every

Christian so let me just take them one by one first of all Christ himself in verse 8 Paul recalls a psalm which talks about God leading a victory parade as he goes up to his city Zion the idea here is that of a general who has won the war and is leading a long line of captive prisoners behind him having triumphed over his enemies the general now generously distributes all the treasures that have been won and Paul now applies this psalm to Christ himself by descending down to earth and humbling himself on the cross Jesus has won the victory and has now ascended to be the

victorious king so that's what verses 8 to 10 are all about and this ascended victorious king now distributes his gifts that's his role verse 7 but to each one of us grace has been given as [19:39] Christ apportioned Paul uses the word grace rather than gift to emphasize that these gifts are freely given by Christ it's not something we can gain ourselves and it's diverse unity does not mean uniformity within our oneness Christ has allocated different gifts to different people and they're all necessary for the growth of the body it's to each one of us that you notice that in verse 7 if you're a Christian God has uniquely equipped you for service and in verse 11 we learn that God has given certain gifts in particular for the benefit of the entire church but these gifts are not things or abilities they are people verse 11 so

Christ himself gave the apostles the prophets the evangelists the pastors and teachers now why are these gifts mentioned in particular because verse 12 they have a unique role in preparing God's people for works of service what they all have in common is that they do word ministry these people these gifts proclaim teach share and counsel the word now does verse 11 mean that we should expect apostles and prophets to be around today and indeed that they should hold some sort of governmental office in the church well in the last few decades this has been a popular teaching making the rounds it's sometimes called the restoration of the five fold ministry although I should emphasize that not all groups who talk about five fold ministry advocate this particular teaching but there are some who teach based on Ephesians chapter 4 verse 11 to 13 that God is restoring apostles and prophets to whole office in his church today in preparation for the end times so let's look a little bit closer at verse 11 now because I'm preaching Ephesians chapter 4 verse 1 to 16 not giving a lecture on apostles and prophets in the Bible I don't want to spend the rest of my time on this chapter but I will need to show you a bit more than I normally would in a sermon so that you will have some idea at how I eventually arrive at my conclusion so let me just give you two basic principles of interpretation number one we always need to look at things in the context of the book first and then number two after that we need to see how it so let's apply principle number one notice that apostles and prophets appear three times in

Ephesians here in chapter 4 verse 11 but also in chapter 2 verse 20 and 3 verse 5 so let's look at chapter 2 verse 19 to 20 first it should appear on the screen consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone now in this instance Ephesians chapter 2 verse 20 is teaching that Jesus is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets themselves are the foundation of the church so Paul seems to be drawing on the analogy of Isaiah chapter 28 verse 16 here next slide which says this next slide see

I lay a stone in Zion a tested stone a precious cornerstone for a sheer foundation the one who relies on it will never be stricken for panic so what we are learning is that Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets are the foundation the first building blocks if you like now how exactly are they the foundation well when we turn to the next instance of apostles and prophets in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 5 this is what we are told so starting from Ephesians chapter 3 verse 4 in reading this then you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets so at least in

[25:10] Ephesians God is identifying the apostles and prophets as the very first generation who receive the message of the gospel in all its fullness so that's how they are foundational they are gospel reviewers and when we turn to the rest of the Bible we find that this is true especially of the apostles so for instance the gang of Peter John and so on are identified as a unique group of gospel reviewers so in Acts chapter 1 verse 21 to 22 for instance the criteria for inclusion into this group is clear you can see it in verse 22 they must have been a witness to Christ's resurrection now that's a pretty limited group and then in places like 2 Peter which is one of the last New Testament letters to be written Christians are exhorted to avoid false doctrine by recalling the teachings of the apostles so look at 2

Peter 3 verse 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles Peter didn't say listen to the new generation of apostles but instead he said and he repeats this over and over again in 2 Peter remember what the apostles and prophets said and so all this points to their foundational role and again a place like Revelation chapter 21 verse 14 confirms this the wall of the city that's the new

Jerusalem had 12 foundations and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb so when we take into account the context of Ephesians and square it with the rest of the New Testament it appears that the apostles and prophets whom Christ have given are foundational and their foundational function has been fulfilled in the first century they are the ones to whom the gospel has been revealed and they in turn reveal the gospel to us through the New Testament so their job is done there are no apostles and prophets anymore today in the sense that they don't give any new authoritative revelation so if you like apostles and prophets with a capital A and P have ceased to exist now that doesn't mean that the gift of prophecy doesn't exist I think places like 1 Corinthians chapter 12 to 14 make clear that the gift of prophesying is still around today now

I'm not preaching today on those passages so I'm not going to say much more but what is clear is that the prophesying being spoken about there is not new authoritative revelation it has to be vague and evaluated it has to be consistent with the gospel and its implications now there's still a lot more things one could say there's a lot more theological framework that could be built but I hope I've given you enough for the moment to see why people who advocate for apostles and prophets to be restored today as governing officers to the church are not right but what we do have around today are the evangelists and pastors and teachers they build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets as those who minister the word today so that brings us to the role of the second party the ministers of the word if the apostles and prophets received the word of the gospel and laid the foundation for the church the evangelists are the spiritual midwives who proclaim the apostolic gospel to non believers and pastors and teachers teach the gospel and how that gospel should work itself out in all areas of life as they teach

God's word and when they do so they equip the body for works of service do you see that in verse 12 pastors and teachers and their commentators who give plausible reasons for seeing the two as actually one group are given to equip God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up now this is important because this is one of the key passages that make clear what the pastor's essential role is it's to teach to equip now that can be done formally from the pulpit or in a classroom as I'm doing now but it can also be done informally in everyday conversation in informal counseling because it's actually the same task being done the pastor is still trying to bring [31 : 04] God's word to bear on your lives so there is actually no need to divide between preaching and pastoral care and when that happens the spirit is pleased to use it to equip you for all kinds of serving teaching is not for the mere downloading of information it's to strengthen and encourage people to unleash their gifts for the good of othersups Lotusym One illustration I heard puts it like this.

The church is not meant to be a bus. The pastor at the driver's seat, maybe the deacon taking the fares, but everyone else passively sitting on the bus just going along for the ride.

No, the church is more like an orchestra. Everyone playing their part with the pastor keeping everyone in time. And that's why James said that those who teach will be judged more strictly. If the conductor is not doing his job, the orchestra will be horribly out of tune. And if the pastor is not doing his job, the church could very well be out of tune with God and with each other.

So he needs to teach to equip. So what does that mean for the congregation member? It means firstly, that pastors really need your prayers.

[32 : 38] I need your prayers. I value them very much. Thank you so much for praying for me and for Pastor Wilfred and for the other pastors in BEM. But it also means that you need to free your pastors, whatever church you're at, not just at KEC, to have times to study and pray and to be able to teach well.

That's not the only thing he does, but it's an essential, non-negotiable part of his calling. And if you are ever in a situation next time where perhaps you move cities and churches and you have to choose a pastor for whatever reason in your new church, you must remember that one key criteria for a pastor is that he is able to teach.

It's here in Ephesians chapter 4. It's in other places like 1 Timothy. For it's actually for the good of the entire church body when a pastor can teach to equip as well as he possibly can by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tom Rainer, who does research into church congregations, once did a survey of churches. And he discovered that if the pastor did every single thing the congregation wanted him to do, it would come up to a minimum of 114 hours per week.

So that's roughly 16 hours per day with no off day. But Paul makes clear that if the pastor did everything, the church body will come to nothing.

[34 : 17] He needs to make teaching to equip one big priority. So it's important that pastors not become the personal stress balls of the congregation.

You know what a stress ball is? It's those malleable balls that you squeeze in your hand when you're feeling stress or tension. Ephesians 4 reminds us, don't squeeze the pastors.

This brings me to the role of the third party. Every Christian. For every Christian, you see, in God's new humanity, has a part to play.

Not just pastors, because everyone is gifted. And what are they to be doing? Well, all sorts of ministry. All sorts of service, because ministry is service.

And you can get as creative as you want. But you see, everyone is in full-time ministry, because every Christian serves the Lord.

[35 : 24] And verse 15. Every Christian is to speak the truth in love to one another. They have to learn to encourage one another in Christ.

And I think we'll hear more about that next Sunday. But let me just share with you one encouragement where I see this happening. And that's at Focus, our college Bible group.

Over the last year, I've been trying to teach and equip them. And this year, in the last three months especially, I see all kinds of ministry happening among them.

Some of them have been leading the Bible studies rather than me. I've only led one Bible study this entire year. I just provide the coaching and feedback. I know that many of them, under prompting from God's word, have stepped up to faithfully serve in many ways you don't see for your good.

For example, they're the ones who look after your children in the crash at God's big picture. They're the ones responsible for some of the flyers you see.

[36 : 32] And I've seen them begin to encourage and love one another to look out for the newcomer. You see, Ephesians chapter 4 verse 16 is slowly but surely happening to focus.

Verse 16, Well, wouldn't it be great if we could say that about KEC as a whole?

Well, before I close, let me just name two dangers every church faces that today's passage speaks to. One is the danger of entitlement.

This is what happens when people begin to think that the church has to be the exact way they want it to be. So the songs must be exactly the right style and length of time.

That row of seats is for my family to sit in, not anyone else. The preacher should preach a challenging message, but not too challenging. See, when a sense of entitlement creeps in, it kills a church's unity and it brings death to it eventually.

[37 : 58] And so that's why we need to keep the spirit's unity by being completely humble and gentle as one body. The other danger is the danger of inadequacy.

This is what happens when people begin to think that there's no way that God can use them in a church. If you feel inadequate, you naturally wouldn't want to stand up to serve because you don't think you have anything to offer.

You look at person X or Y and say, I could never do that. But that's also not good for a church because it means that the church body doesn't get to enjoy the gifts that God has given you.

And so we become stunted. We don't grow as we should. And so that's why we need to hear Ephesians 4, verse 7 to 16. To remember the grace that Christ has allocated to each of us.

To be eager to be equipped for service. And to know that as each part does its work, the whole body grows and builds itself up in love.

[39 : 16] So go. Get alongside that teenager whom no one is talking to. Go and volunteer to help relieve some of the burden of admin for that social concerns project.

Whatever it is, it all counts for the kingdom. A healthy church is a bodybuilding church where every part is doing its work.

So let's all grow together in the fullness of Christ. Let's pray. I'll just give us about 10 seconds or so just to reflect on what we've heard.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus has died and risen again. We thank you that he has ascended to the heavens. And we thank you that that is where he has distributed gifts to each of us in the church body.

So Father, we pray, Lord, that indeed we will play our part, whatever part you have for us in the kingdom. We pray that we would serve you this way and serve each other.

[40 : 45] Please help us to avoid the opposite dangers of entitlement and inadequacy. Will you help us to be humble and gentle? And will you also help us to be ready to serve others?
And in this way, may we act as your new humanity, putting on display your wisdom to the world.
May you be pleased to use your word today.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Thank you.