

Being Part of the Church

Lesson 4: Members of the Body of Christ

Notes for the leader: This is the fourth in a series of lessons about "Being Part of the Church." Everyone involved in prison ministry realizes that the most important thing a Christian ex-inmate can do is to become an accountable member of a solid Christian fellowship in his community. What should he be looking for? This lesson focuses on how each of us is responsible for using the gifts God has given us as members of his Church.

Introduction

In previous lessons in this series, we learned that **every Christian needs to be an accountable member of an active Christian community.** God doesn't expect us to succeed all by ourselves. **We need His help and the support of our local church.**

We have emphasized some of the main things you need to look for when you are looking for a church to become part of – a **community** where the leaders and members

- **teach sound doctrine**, based on the Bible, God's Word,
- **demonstrate God's love**, both inside their own fellowship and by reaching out to others,
- and **work together as a unified body**, with each member **using the spiritual gifts** that God has given him or her for the good of the body.

In the previous lesson, we focused on **spiritual gifts** and how each of us is responsible for **understanding** and **using** our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are **supernatural abilities**, which come from the **Holy Spirit**, and which **enable us to help other people grow spiritually** as members of God's Kingdom. The **spiritual gift** a Christian receives from God reflects the **specific "mission" God is giving him** or her as a member of the church. Spiritual gifts are different from natural abilities. We all have natural abilities – and **God also expects us to use all the natural abilities that He has given us** to serve Him and help build His Kingdom.

We then looked at the comparison Paul made between the church and a human body, in Romans, Chapter 12. Paul says that **the church is like a human body** -- there are **many different kinds of parts** and **many different kinds of people**, and **every one has a job to play** in keeping the **body** strong and healthy, and in keeping the **church** strong and healthy.

Now let's look at Ephesians, Chapter 4, and see what Paul tells us we need to do to be members of a Christian community. At the time Paul wrote this letter, he was under house arrest in Rome.

Ephesians 4:1-3

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

We need to remember that **any community of Christians is also a community of sinners**. We need to remember that, both as individuals and as members of a local church. We will never find a perfect church – at least in this life – because **all of us fail sometimes, even when we are trying our best** to “live a life worthy of the calling we have received.” Therefore, we need to be patient with each other. You may have seen the bumper sticker that says, **“Please be patient ... God isn’t finished with me yet.”** That’s true for all of us!

Paul goes on to point out **some of the things we all have in common** as followers of Christ:

Ephesians 4:4-7

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.

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

The word **“grace”** means **“the undeserved mercy and love we receive from God.”** In verse 7, Paul is referring to the spiritual gifts God gives us to serve Him and His Church. Then, starting in verse 11, Paul explains God’s purposes in providing different gifts to different people:

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

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

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

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.

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 men in their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

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.

First, he tells us about the special gifts given to leaders of the church. Then he explains how **church leaders** are responsible for using these gifts to help **everyone** discover and develop their **own** spiritual gifts, so that **all of us** can use our gifts for the good of others.

Finally, Paul reminds us **who** is the **Head** of the **Church**. The **pastor** isn't the head of the church. The **deacons** or **elders** aren't the head of the church. If this is a **healthy church**, everyone knows that the church is **Jesus' church** – and they never forget it!

The discussion questions focus on this passage. Let's look in more detail at the important truths that Paul is giving us here.

***Notes for the leader:** Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.*

Follow-up Discussion

***Notes for the leader:** The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.*

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. What attitudes do we need to have within the church? (vv. 2-3)

Humbleness, gentleness, patience ... we need "put up with" imperfect Christians!

2. What things do all true Christians have in common? (vv. 4-6)

One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father – we need to emphasize the "majors"

3. What is the main responsibility of a pastor and other church leaders? (vv. 11-12)

*To prepare God's people for works of service – this means helping the members of the church **discover** their spiritual gifts and **learn to use them** for the benefit of the whole church*

4. What are God's goals for all members of the church? (vv. 13-15)

*Unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God ... spiritual maturity, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. This includes everyone **using their spiritual gifts***

5. Who is the ultimate head of the church? Who holds it all together? (v. 16)

***Jesus** is the head of the church! The **pastor** isn't the head of the church. The **deacons** or **elders** aren't the head of the church. If this is a **healthy church**, everyone knows that the church is **Jesus' church** – and they never forget it! **Jesus** determines who receives which spiritual gifts. The church is responsible for helping people to **discover** and **use** their gifts.*

***Notes for the leader:** Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!*

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Members of the Body of Christ (*Ephesians 4:1-16*)

1. What attitudes do we need to have within the church? (vv. 2-3)
2. What things do all true Christians have in common? (vv. 4-6)
3. What is the main responsibility of a pastor and other church leaders? (vv. 11-12)
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Take-home Thoughts About ...

Being a Member of the Body of Christ

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he says that the church can be compared to a human body (*Romans 12:4-8*), which has many parts with many different functions. Our bodies are healthy only when **all** of our parts are doing their different jobs. In the same way, **a church is healthy only when all of its members are using their gifts to serve Him and to serve each other.**

We must never take pride in whatever spiritual gift God has given us, for it is He (not us) who decides which gifts go to which people.: *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 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. (Ephesians 4:11-13)*

Notice that Paul is saying that **the job of the pastors and other leaders in the church is to prepare God's people** (that's us) **to do the work of the church** – to help people **discover and learn to use their spiritual gifts**. Some church members expect the pastors and leaders to do all the work, while they just want to be “blessed” and entertained. But that's not how the church works. **The work of building God's Kingdom is up to us – what we do in our lives from day to day to help others spiritually.**

God wants us all to be **united** in the faith. He wants us to be **mature** in the faith. And He wants us to be **as much like His Son as possible**. But we must never forget that **the church belongs to Jesus Christ** – it is not **our** church, not the **pastor's** church, not the **deacons' or elders'** church. Find a church where everyone understands that and acts accordingly!

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