

## Because of Christ

By Linda Rex

**August 4, 2024, Proper 13 / After Pentecost**—As I was reflecting upon the New Testament passage for this Sunday, Ephesians 4:1–16, it occurred to me that many people today do not see or understand the value and significance of participating in a spiritual fellowship such as a church. Churches, and their accompanying denominations, have received a lot of criticism and ridicule in recent years. And many of us are too busy with life elsewhere to be actively involved in a church, or we have no interest in anything having to do with matters of faith.

This is understandable, considering our human history and how often we as human beings within the body of Christ have fallen so short of what Christ called us to be. The reality is that when the Spirit brings people together and unites them in Christ, these people are still learning and growing, and are in the process of maturing into Christ. Our purpose in joining in fellowship with others of like mind and heart is not to be or become perfect people, but to grow up in Christ and to serve God and others, in love and unity.

The apostle Paul stressed the importance of unity within the body of Christ, a unity which is only possible in and through the work of Jesus by his Spirit. Jesus led the way and brought us up into his own union and communion with his Father in the Spirit, and he is the head of his body, the Church (speaking of the universal, all-encompassing, cross-denominational and cross-distinctives body of Christ). God brings together in Christ by his Spirit people from all walks of life, all different sorts of people who may or may not like one another or understand one another.

I thought I would share some bullet points on this passage. I think they say well what we need to learn from Paul about being the body of Christ, the Church:

- *Because Christ has given us his fullness in the Spirit and made us one with God*—we are to maintain our unity in Christ. We are to beware of any attempt to cause division within the body of Christ. We are all one in Christ Jesus. We may worship differently, we may have a relationship with God that is different than someone else, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. We are to keep Christ at the center and we will have room for one another.<sup>1</sup>
- *Because Christ has given us his fullness in the Spirit and made us one with God*—we offer ourselves in works of service. How has he uniquely gifted each of us? In what way can we serve others the way Christ serves us? No one is left out of Jesus' generous gift of grace or of his calling to serve others. What would Christ have us do to participate with him in building up his body?
- *Because Christ has given us his fullness in the Spirit and made us one with God*—we participate in equipping or being equipped. Has God called us and gifted us uniquely to act as a ligament or joint in his body, to hold it together by serving as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher? Then we are to do the work of service Christ has given us and diligently equip others for service. If we were not called to be a joint or ligament, then God called us and gifted us to do works of service in some other part of the body.<sup>2</sup> We are to allow the Spirit to empower us to serve with Christ's heart of service. We are to allow ourselves to be equipped by those God has gifted to equip us. We are to stay grounded in Christ and grow in our knowledge of the Son of God.
- *Because Christ has given us his fullness in the Spirit and made us one with God*—we are to speak the truth in love. Christ is the fullest expression of love and is the truth of our human existence, having lived our life, died our death, and risen for our salvation. He himself is the fullness we all are to grow up in until we reach maturity. He is the truth we speak in love.<sup>3 4</sup>

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- *Because Christ has given us his fullness in the Spirit and made us one with God*—we are to grow up in Christ. We are to stop being childish, easily swayed and distracted by every new spiritual fad that comes our way. We are to turn from anything that distracts us from Christ or from being busy doing the works of service he has called us to do. We are to participate with him in building up his church and maintaining its unity as members of his body.

As you read these bullet points, what stood out to you? Is there some way in which the Lord is wanting you to reframe your view of the body of Christ, the Church? How is the Lord calling you to join with others in service to him and his people? Take the time to be still before God and to invite Jesus to speak to you about this. What does he have to say to you? Are you listening?

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<sup>1</sup> Sproul, RC, *The Purpose of God, An exposition of Ephesians*. Scotland (Christian Focus Publications via Logos Software, 1994), Eph 4:7-16.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. USA (SP Publications, Inc. via Logos Software), Eph. 4, section I.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>4</sup> Stone, Sam E., ed., *Sermon Outlines on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*. Cincinnati, Ohio (The Standard Publishing Company, 1995), The Unity of the Spirit—Ephesians 4:1–16.

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*Dear Father, Jesus, Spirit, you draw us together into union and communion with you and others, growing us up into the full maturity of Christ. Grant us the grace to hear your call and to respond obediently, by participating fully within your body of believers, the Church, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.*

*“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 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. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’ (Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:1–16 NASB*