

Ephesians

One Church: United & Diverse
Ephesians 4:4-16

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a "transforming church". We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." Since "Talking Points, Walking Points" is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to "dive deep" too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled "Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time", are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you? ...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Review the **seven affirmations which unify the church** (see **Sermon Summary**).

The Bible says that these issues **unify** the church (the word "one" appears 8x in Ephesians 4:1-6!). Yet many churches disagree on these issues! What different positions are you aware of regarding:

- (1) one "body"—Should we even have denominations? If so, which denomination is right?
 - (2) one "spirit"—Some say all believers must speak in tongues; others, no. So, who's right?
 - (3) one "hope"—Some Christians say health and prosperity is God's will for all; others, no. Hmmmm...
 - (4) one "lord"—Was Jesus into social justice or eternal salvation? Or something else?
 - (5) one "faith"—All Christians don't believe exactly the same things. What is **the** Christian faith?
 - (6) one "baptism"—Sprinkle or immerse? Kids too, or only adults? What is baptism? What's it for?
 - (7) one "father"—Do we believe in the universal brotherhood of man? If not, who is "family"?
- How can a commitment to the "Apostolic Faith" (see **1. Apostles** in the **Sermon Summary**) of Ephesians 2:20 (also see 1 John 1:1-3) help unify a church?

Is the Bible a "living document"—subject to renovation—or a "fixed document"?

How do we discern and agree upon the content of that "Apostolic Faith"? What if we disagree?

Sermon Summary

In Ephesians 4:1-3 Paul exhorts us to live in a manner that is worthy of our high calling in Christ Jesus—with humility, gentleness and patience. In v. 4-6 Paul lists **seven affirmations which unify God's people, the church**. All of these affirmations revolve around God's triune nature; the first three relate to God the Holy Spirit, the second three to God the Son, Jesus Christ, and the final one to God the Father.

1. One Body This “one body” reference here is an allusion to the fact that while the church of Jesus Christ is made up of many different individuals, we are one unified body. We are individually different, but corporately and spiritually unified. God has brought two naturally opposing groups, Jews and Gentiles, together into one big spiritual family (1 Corinthians 12:13). **2. One Spirit** It is our common possession of the one Holy Spirit that integrates us into one family of believers. **3. One Hope** Our eternal hope is tied up with this unifying work of the Holy Spirit. **4. One Lord** What unites us is our common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. **5. One Faith** Christ is the head of the church and the object of our faith. **6. One Baptism** It is into Jesus that we have been baptized or united. All of the spiritual blessings that we enjoy as Christians come to us because of our spiritual union with Christ. **7. One Father** There is one Christian family, because there is one God and Father. We are brothers and sisters. What God has unified, we must be careful not to divide.

Paul then shows that the unity of the church is reflected in a diversity of spiritual gifts (v. 11-13). There are several lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible, and none of them are the same. I conclude that God wasn't interested in preserving a precise list of spiritual gifts. I suspect that God gives spiritual gifts that aren't even mentioned in the New Testament. **Ephesians lists five gifts:** **1. Apostles** The Greek word *apostolos* means “sent one”. In the broadest sense, every Christian is “sent” (John 13:16). We all are sent to represent Christ. Then, sometimes this word is applied to messengers sent out by a local church on some official errand (Philippians 2:25). Both of these uses can be called “little a” apostles. But here in Ephesians 4:11 Paul has a specialized meaning in mind: that small, distinctive group consisting of the Twelve (including Matthias who replaced Judas), Paul, James the Lord's brother. These men were personally chosen by Jesus and had to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; 10:40-41; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-9). These are apostles with an upper case “A”. **2. Prophets** Here again it is necessary to make a distinction: a prophet was a spokesman for God, a special vehicle of God's direct revelation. In this sense, we must insist that there are no prophets of that stature today. No one today can claim, “God told me...” If prophets like that existed today, we would have to add their words to the Bible, honoring their words as Scripture. This is the sense in which Paul uses the word in Ephesians (1:1; 2:20; 3:5 & 4:11). That foundation was laid and finished centuries ago, and we must not tinker with it today. It is a serious thing to claim to be a Prophet with a capital “P”. But in a “lower case p” sense, rather than new prophecies, the regular, systematic, thoughtful exposition of the Bible must be viewed as the most important way the church is built up today. **3. Evangelists** God has called all of us to share our faith, but a person with the gift of evangelism has the God-given ability to make the gospel particularly clear and relevant to unbelievers. **4. Pastors** and **5. Teachers** The construction used here in the Greek implies that this is a single gift, the “pastor-teacher”. While every pastor must also be a teacher, not every Christian teacher is also a pastor. Pastors shepherd local congregations, through their teaching and their leadership, care and oversight.

These are the gifts Paul highlights here, but **for what purpose** has God given these gifts to the church? My job as a pastor-teacher isn't to “do the work of the ministry” so much as it is to equip you to do the work of the ministry (4:12). So, what does a strong, healthy church look like? It must be mature, looking like Christ (4:13). And, **what does maturity look like; how does maturity express itself?** It is characterized by doctrinal stability; not easily deceived by false teaching. It is a perceptive, theologically discriminating church. Its ministry and doctrine are rooted in accurate interpretation of the Bible. A mature church is characterized by a delicate balance of truth and love, and by every-member ministry (4:14-16).

The Bible, and only the Bible, has the authority to define the church. So, what IS the church? An institution? A club or voluntary association? It's much more than most of us realize! In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul referred to the church as "the household of God", "the assembly of the Living God", and "the pillar and support of the truth".

Monday—Key Truth: The true church is God's redeemed people. It belongs to God.

- Read Matthew 16:18. **Whose** church is the church?
How do you typically feel about things that are yours? How do you think God feels about his church?
- Acts 20:28 says: "...God purchased the church with His own blood."
How do you typically feel about things that cost you dearly? So, how do you think God feels about his church?
- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 says: **"Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."**
English does not distinguish second-person **singular** from second-person **plural** ("you" vs. "you all"), but Greek does, so I've clarified them for you below. Let's dig deeply into this rich passage.
⇒ **"Do you (plural) not know that you (plural) are a temple of God..."** What does Paul say that the church in Corinth is?
⇒ **"...and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (plural)?"** Believers are God's temple. Who dwells in them?
⇒ **"... If any man (singular) corrupts the temple of God, God will destroy him (singular)..."** Who protects the church? But what does it mean to "corrupt" the church ("the temple of God")?! Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-13 & 3:3-7 to find out!

Tuesday—Key Truth: The church as we know it on Earth is a mixture of "wheat and weeds"—true believers and lost people.

- Read Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43. Complete the following chart:

The sower (v. 24, 37) is...
The field (v. 24, 38) is...
The good seed (v. 27, 38) are...
The bad seed (v. 25-27, 38) are...
The enemy who mixes unbelievers among believers (v. 25, 39) is...
When did the difference between the wheat and the weeds become evident (v. 26)?
When will the weeds be removed from the wheat (v. 28-30, 39)?
After the weeds have been removed, how will the church appear (v. 43)?
Do you know for certain that you're "wheat"? How can you know?

Wednesday—Key Truth: The entire Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—are committed to the church.

- Read Ephesians 1:3-5. **When** did the Father choose us (v. 4)? What does v. 5 call this act of choosing?
- Read Ephesians 4:12 and 5:25. **Whose body** is the church? How did Christ make us his body?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:13. **Who** places us into the body of Christ? What does John 3:6-8 call this act?
- Read 1 Peter 1:1-2. Show how each member of the Trinity is intimately involved in the origin and operation of the church.

Thursday—Key Truth: The church is the "pillar and support" of God's truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

- Look up "pillar" in a standard English dictionary (such as dictionary.com). What is a pillar? What function does it accomplish? Look up "support" in the dictionary. What does a "support" do? What happens when something is unsupported?
- Wait! Isn't God's Word powerful (Hebrews 4:12)?! Does truth **really need** to be supported? (Before you answer, go to YouTube and watch: "Victoria Osteen: Worship for YOURSELF!")
- What role should pastors play in "supporting the truth"? What role should church members play in supporting the truth?
- Skim Revelation 2-3 and place a "✓" next to the names of the churches which did a good job "supporting the truth" and a "x" next to those which failed to "support the truth": Ephesus (2:1-7), Smyrna (2:8-11), Pergamum (2:12-17), Thyatira (2:18-29), Sardis (3:1-6), Philadelphia (3:7-13), Laodicea (3:14-22).
- **How many** of the seven churches of Revelation still exist today? So, **how important is it** that the truth be supported?

Friday—Key Truth: The church "supports the truth" by **proclaiming** it and by **protecting** it.

- Read Acts 13:1-2. **Who** initiates the proclamation of the truth?
Read Ephesians 4:11-16. In v. 11, **who** proclaims the truth? In v. 15-16 **who** proclaims the truth?
- According to Titus 3:9-11, **who** protects the truth? (Hint: To whom was "Titus" written—to a pastor or to church members?)
According to Romans 16:17, **who** protects the truth? (Hint: To whom was Romans written—to a pastor or to church members?)
- According to 2 Timothy 2:15-26, **how** do we protect the truth?

Saturday—Key Truth: The purposes of the church include worship, evangelism, discipleship, and caring for one-another.

- Read John 4:23-24. What do you learn about worship?
Read Philippians 3:1-3. What do you learn about worship?
Compare Colossians 3:16-17 to Ephesians 5:18-21. What do you learn about worship?
- Read Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:18-20. Although these originally were spoken to the Apostles only, what hints do we see in them which prove that they are for all believers to obey?
- What is commanded in Romans 14:19? How do you think disciples are "built up"?
Read Acts 2:41-47. What were all the things listed here that built new believers up in their faith?
- Read Acts 4:32-35. How do we see believers caring for one another in this passage?
 1. According to Romans 12:10, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 2. According to Romans 14:19, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 3. According to Romans 15:7, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 4. According to Ephesians 4:2, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 5. According to Ephesians 5:21, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 6. According to Philippians 2:13, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 7. According to Colossians 3:13, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?
 8. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:13, specifically what must you do to build up other believers?