

One Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

How many churches are there? Which *one* did you grow in, if you did? How many churches did Jesus come to establish (Matt. 16:18)? If the church is one, what do we make of the multitude of Christian churches we find today with many things in common and many things different? These are important questions because Jesus died for the church (Eph. 5:25), and it's the church "which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:22). We have to remember that the constant references to the church in the New Testament refer mostly to the little groups of believers living in real time around the Mediterranean. These are the churches that fill the pages of the New Testament, and they would be the ones to grow and replicate until the Roman Empire was mostly Christian by the fourth century. The church, and every local expression of it, is centrally important in the life of every Christian. Jesus doesn't just save individuals, *he saves a people*. He came to forgive us of our sins for sure, but he also puts us into a new family—the church.

A Given Unity

Church unity is not fundamentally created by us; the unity of the Spirit is given to us (v3). We are then *called* to maintain it, acknowledging what God has done and eagerly preserving it (vv1-2). We didn't necessarily ask to be part of the family, and there are probably some people in it we don't naturally get along with, but that doesn't change our circumstances or obligations. Paul hammers home our unity in seven ways (vv4-6).

- i. One body and one Spirit – The church is the *one* body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12, 27). In Ephesus there were multiple houses where churches met, but still they were part of the one body of Christ. The body of Christ is not divided by distance or buildings any more than a family is divided by parts of it living across town or in another part of the country. The unity of the Christian church is not threatened by denominations as such. By the same Spirit we say "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3).
- ii. One hope – As Paul said to the Sanhedrin, his hope was in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:7). When we think of the goal of human history, we should hope and think of the resurrection, when everything will be put right. This hope is much bigger than simply going to heaven, and without it, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor. 15:16-19).
- iii. One Lord – We are one body in Christ, united and made alive by one Spirit, and we serve one master. We are concerned to serve him, and him alone, and not to worry about others (Jn. 21:22).
- iv. One faith, one baptism – Doesn't Paul know our differing definitions of faith and baptism? He probably did, but regardless, faith *in* God is the gift *of* God, given to all his people. Because we are justified by faith apart from the works law, even those who mess up the definition of justification by faith can still be saved; they are justified by faith, not by their ability to correctly define it. We draw the lines of fellowship where God does, and those baptized into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are confessing Christians. The reformers, for example, did not get re-baptized when they were kicked out of the Roman Catholic Church. This does not downplay our differences with Rome and Constantinople, but seeks to work them out.
- v. One God and Father of, over, through and in all -- Paul echoes the *shema*, Israel's confession, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut. 6:4). We are in one family, and our Father loves and blesses all the church(es), tolerating no sibling rivalry.

An Increasing Unity

The church was not made perfect mature at Pentecost. Jesus ascended so that he could equip the saints for the work of ministry (v12). Until what? We grow up in every way into Christ (v15). This includes *every* part working properly, which means there are no unimportant churches, and no unimportant people in God's family. Everyone has something to give and everyone has a lot to learn.

Little Saints Notes

1. Into what name were you baptized?
2. The church is the _____ and _____ of Christ.
3. What denomination does your church belong to?
4. How does Trinity Church feel about other churches that exist in our town?
5. When you are away on vacation or if you move away, why should you worship at another church?
6. How can you serve the church and the people in it?
7. How many times is the word “one” used in Ephesians 4:1-16?
8. Draw a picture of a cool church building.