

## LESSON 1

# One Body, Many Members

Ephesians 4:1–7; 15–16

*Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

### Ephesians 4:1–3

**Class Overview:** In this opening lesson, we will explore God’s design for the church as one body made up of many members, each uniquely gifted and purposefully placed by Christ. Drawing from Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12, this lesson emphasizes that unity in the church is not uniformity but shared life under one Lord. We will see that every Christian is essential to the health and work of the body, that diversity is part of God’s plan rather than a threat to unity, and that true spiritual growth occurs when each member actively contributes in love. This lesson sets the foundation for the quarter by calling every member of the local congregation to embrace both their identity and responsibility within the body of Christ.

### Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. **Understand** God’s design for the church as one unified body made up of many distinct members under Christ’s headship (Ephesians 4:4–6; 1 Corinthians 12:12).
2. **Recognize** that unity in the church is not uniformity, but shared purpose and life in Christ, expressed through diverse gifts and functions (Ephesians 4:7; Romans 12:4–5).
3. **Identify** attitudes and assumptions that weaken the body—such as independence, comparison, or withdrawal—and explain why every member is necessary (1 Corinthians 12:21–26).

4. **Appreciate** personal responsibility within the body by acknowledging one's role in contributing to the church's health, development, and mutual care (Ephesians 4:16).
5. **Commit** to at least one action that supports unity and active participation in the local congregation during the quarter.

## Introduction

BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT GROWTH, MATURITY, OR SERVICE, we must begin with who we are together. Every one of us comes into our study with a different story. Different backgrounds. Different strengths. Different struggles. Some of us are new in faith. Some have walked with Christ for decades. Some feel deeply connected. Others may feel a little on the outside looking in. Yet despite all that, in Christ, we are one body.

God didn't build His church to be a room full of isolated people who happen to sit near each other on Sundays. He made something way more connected than that—a living body where everyone matters and no one walks alone. You're not invisible in this. And you're definitely not unnecessary. When one member rejoices, we all rejoice. When one member hurts, we all feel it. (Romans 12:15)

As we begin our study on *Building Up the Body*, we will start right where God begins: with unity. Not a superficial unity that avoids conflict, but a deep, Christ-centered unity that values every member and calls each of us to meaningful participation. I hope that as we study together, you'll not only see how God built the church, but you'll also be reminded why *you* matter in it.

If we want to understand what the church is supposed to be, we need to pay close attention to how God describes it. The clearest picture we have is found in Paul's words to the church at Ephesus: a congregation learning, just like us, how to live faithfully together. In Ephesians 4, Paul pulls back the curtain and reveals God's plan for unity, spiritual development, and maturity in the body of Christ. As we look there

now, listen not only for what Paul says about the church, but also for what he says about *each of us* and our role within it.

## **The Body Is One Because Christ Is One (Ephesians 4:4–6)**

Unity is grounded in something much deeper than human agreement or organizational structure. He reminds us that there is *one body and one Spirit*, just as there is *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all*. These are spiritual realities that God has established through Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, Paul explains that just as the human body is one but made up of many parts, so is Christ. He emphasizes that *through one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*, regardless of background or status. Unity, then, is not the result of similarity — it is the result of shared participation in Christ. Jesus Himself prayed for this kind of unity. In John 17:20–21, He asked the Father that we would be one *as you are in me and I am in you*. Our unity is meant to reflect the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Because unity is rooted in Christ, it is not dependent on personality, preference, or perspective. *In Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others*. (Romans 12:5) Belonging precedes behavior. We are connected before we ever contribute. These facts must shape how we respond to tension and disagreement. Differences do not mean unity has failed. Rather, they test whether we remember what already binds us together. Philippians 2:1–2 reminds us to be united because we share in the encouragement of Christ, the comfort of love, and participation in the Spirit. Unity is protected when we remember our shared spiritual life.

When Paul talks about one body, he's reminding us of our identity before addressing our responsibilities. The church is united because Christ is one. Our goal isn't just to create unity but to live in a way that reflects the unity God has already given us: protecting it, respecting it, and allowing it to influence how we treat each other.

## Diversity Is God's Design, Not a Threat (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:14–20)

After establishing the unity of the body, Paul quickly addresses the reality of differences within the church. In Ephesians 4:7, he writes, *Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Unity does not erase individuality. Instead, Christ distributes grace in different ways so the body can function as He designed it.

“Grace” in this context isn't referring to saving grace but to the gracious enablement Christ provides for service within the body. This grace includes the abilities, opportunities, and roles Christ gives to each Christian so the church can function properly. It isn't earned, chosen, or self-assigned; it is received from Christ based on His wisdom. In other words, the differences we observe among ourselves aren't accidents or personal achievements. They are expressions of Christ's generosity to His church.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches that a body consisting of only one part would not truly be a body. Eyes, hands, feet, and ears serve different purposes, yet all are essential. Diversity is not a flaw in the design; it is the design itself. God never intended the church to be uniform in function, ability, or role. The same idea is found in Romans 12:6, where Paul reminds us that, *by the grace given to us, we have different gifts.* These differences are not accidental or self-made; they are graciously given by God for the benefit of the whole. When we understand diversity correctly, it becomes a source of strength rather than division.

Problems come up when we see diversity in a worldly way. Comparison, competition, and resentment quickly occur when we start ranking gifts or downplaying our own contributions. We must reject the lie the devil spreads that says a member is unimportant just because it works differently. God values, not visibility. Diversity needs patience and humility. In Colossians 3:12–13, we are called to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; virtues that are vital in a group where people differ in temperament, maturity, and experience.

Diversity within the body of Christ does not mean tolerating error or simply “agreeing to disagree” on issues of truth. In the New Testament, unity is always rooted *in Christ and the truth of the gospel*. Paul repeatedly warns that false teaching and doctrinal compromise do not strengthen the body but harm it (Ephesians 4:14). Therefore, leaders are told to *hold firmly to the faithful message as taught* so they can both encourage others with sound doctrine and correct those who oppose it (Titus 1:9). While Christians may differ in maturity, background, and role, the church is called to share the same faith and teachings. True unity is not maintained by ignoring doctrinal differences but by lovingly protecting the truth and growing together in it.

But when the true concept of diversity is embraced as God’s gift, the church becomes healthier and more resilient. Different strengths complement each other. Different perspectives sharpen one another. Different roles work together toward a shared mission. Christ did not design His body for competition, but for cooperation. Diversity, then, is not something to tolerate reluctantly; it is something to steward faithfully. When each member honors the grace given to others, the body grows stronger, more balanced, and more effective in reflecting Christ to the world.

## **Every Member is Necessary** **(1 Corinthians 12:21–27)**

After explaining unity and diversity, Paul addresses a problem that quietly weakens many churches: the belief that some members matter more than others, or that some members do not matter at all. In 1 Corinthians 12:21, Paul makes it clear that no part of the body can say to another, *‘I don’t need you.’* Interdependence is not a weakness in the body of Christ; it is the defining feature of it.

Paul confronts two dangerous mindsets simultaneously. One is **pride**: the idea that certain roles or individuals are self-sufficient. The other is **discouragement**, the belief that one’s contribution is too small or insignificant to matter. Both distort God’s design. The eye cannot function without the hand, and the head cannot dismiss the feet. Every part has a role that supports the life of the whole.

1 Corinthians 12:22–24 teaches that God gives greater honor to the parts that seem weaker or less visible. This overturns human thinking. In the church, worth is not measured by how much you stand out. God values faithfulness, service, and care, often expressed quietly and consistently. What the world might overlook, God deliberately honors.

Romans 12:10 is very straightforward. We are called to *outdo one another in showing honor*. This is a radical challenge. A mature church is one where members actively recognize and appreciate one another's contributions rather than competing for recognition. When honor is shared, unity deepens, and resentment fades. Another great passage to consider is 1 Corinthians 12:26: *If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it*. This goes beyond mere sympathy and describes spiritual connection. The health of the body is directly tied to how well its members care for one another.

In Christ's body, no one is disposable, and no one is independent. Each member of the local church is placed where they are for a reason. When everyone embraces their necessity and values the necessity of others, the church becomes stronger, healthier, and better equipped to reflect Christ to the world.

## **This Happens When Every Part Does Its Work (Ephesians 4:15–16)**

Unity, diversity, and necessity have a natural outcome: growth. In Ephesians 4:15–16, we see that the body grows *as each part does its work*, with Christ as the head who holds everything together. This is not accidental or automatic; it is the result of every member functioning as God intends. Here, Paul emphasizes that it is both truth-centered and love-driven. The body grows as we speak the truth in love, helping one another mature into Christlikeness. Truth without love can damage relationships, and love without truth can stall spiritual maturation. Healthy churches refuse to choose between the two. They pursue maturity by holding firmly to truth while remaining deeply committed to one another.

In Colossians 2:19, where Paul warns against losing connection to the head, *from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together. . . grows with growth from God*. When we remain connected to Christ and to one another, this is supplied by God. But when parts disengage, the body suffers. This also challenges the idea that spiritual progress is primarily the responsibility of leaders. While teachers and shepherds equip the saints, *the work of ministry belongs to the whole body* (Ephesians 4:12). Churches stagnate when a few carry the load. Churches mature when every member contributes faithfully, even in small and unseen ways.

The result of this shared participation is a body that is *built up in love*. A life measured by Christ is not just numerical or organizational: it is relational and spiritual. It is seen in deeper faith, stronger relationships, and greater readiness to serve. When every part does its work, the church becomes what God intends it to be: a living, growing body that reflects Christ's character and advances His purposes in the world.

## **For Application**

We have to stop thinking of ourselves as separate from the body. Christianity was never meant to be lived on the sidelines. In Christ, we belong to each other. And that belonging comes with responsibility. When you're absent, it matters. When you disengage, it affects people. What you bring to the body — your faith, your steadiness, your service — strengthens everyone else.

We also have to learn to value what others bring without constantly measuring ourselves against them. God didn't design the body as a competition. He distributed gifts on purpose, according to His wisdom. And comparison will wreck you. You either shrink back in discouragement or puff up in pride. Neither helps the church. But when we genuinely honor one another's roles, the whole body gets stronger.

Two attitudes will quietly damage a church: independence and invisibility. Some people act like they don't need anyone. Others assume they don't matter. Both are wrong. Both hurt the body. God built His church so that every member is necessary. Spiritual health

shows up in shared burdens, honest connection, and people who are involved — not just attending.

And unity doesn't happen by accident. It has to be guarded. Not by pretending everything is fine. Not by avoiding hard conversations. Real unity comes when we hold tightly to the truth and speak it with love — with patience, humility, and a willingness to listen. Faithfulness to Christ and care for one another aren't enemies. They belong together.

So, we have to participate. It doesn't happen because a few people carry the load. It happens when every part does its work. That doesn't mean you have to be extraordinary. It means you have to be faithful. Offer what Christ has given you. Show up. Serve. Stay connected. And when each member does that, the body is built up in love and Christ becomes more visible in us.

## **Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge**

### **Memory Verse:**

“Now you are the body of Christ, and individual members of it.”  
— 1 Corinthians 12:27

### **Challenge:**

This week, take steps to live as an active member of the body rather than a passive observer. Look for one specific way to encourage or support another member of the congregation—through a conversation, a note, a prayer, or an act of service. At the same time, reflect honestly on where you are currently connected to the life of the church and ask yourself how you might participate more fully. Come back next week ready to share one way you sought to strengthen the body through your actions.

## For Reflection

1. What does Paul mean when he describes the church as “one body,” and how does that image challenge individualistic views of faith?

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2. Why is it important to understand that unity is something God has already created rather than something we invent ourselves?

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3. How can comparison—either feeling superior or inferior—undermine the health of the body of Christ?

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4. What are some practical ways we can honor and value members whose contributions are less visible but still essential?

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5. According to Ephesians 4:15–16, what does it look like for every part to “do its work,” and how can we personally contribute to the church’s growth this week?

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