

**YOU CAN HELP BUILD JESUS' CHURCH (Part 2)****EPHESIANS 4:1-16**

How many college basketball fans do we have out there? March Madness is just around the corner! In a few weeks the best college basketball teams in the nation – some 64 plus of them – will enter the NCAA Championship Tournament. People will call in sick to work so they can watch the games. Bars and restaurants will be full. Brackets will be filled out. At the end of the spectacle one team will be crowned as the national champion. I read an article in which professional basketball stars looked back with real longing on those few shorts weeks of regional playoffs, the sweet sixteen, the elite eight, the final four – and if you were lucky enough to survive – the national championship game itself. What those players missed the most was this sense of incredible unity that they experienced with their teammates as they worked together to achieve a common goal. On the one hand, it was incredibly hard. On the other hand, it was so exciting. Looking back, they realized that a big part of the enjoyment and excitement was getting caught up in something bigger than oneself.

There are some real similarities between being on a big time college basketball team and being a part of Jesus' church. How so? A church is like a team. Like a team, a church experiences wins and losses. Being a part of any church can have its incredibly hard, difficult, gut wrenching moments. It can also be wonderfully fun and exciting. The best part of church is that sense of incredible unity that you can experience with other followers of Jesus as you work together to achieve a common goal and get caught up in something a whole lot bigger than yourself – namely, the mission of God Himself. What is God's mission? Bringing lost people into a personal, vital, eternal relationship with Himself through faith in what His Son, Jesus, did for them at the cross and the empty tomb. When God's mission truly becomes the church's mission and everyone is pulling together, it just doesn't get a whole lot better than that!

We're more than half way through our study of a letter that Paul, a great Christian leader in the first century, wrote to several churches in and around the city of Ephesus. Today, we return to a theme – Jesus' church – which Paul began to talk about back in chapter three. Maybe you recall we distinguished between big "C" church and little "c" church. Big "C" church is the universal, spiritual group of people made up of everyone who has ever put his or her trust in Jesus past, present and future. Little "c" church is any local church anywhere on the planet. Although they are different, just about everything that's true of big "C" church is also supposed to be true of little "c" church.

Being a part of the church – both the big "C" and the little "c" varieties – is an absolutely necessary part of your identity as a child of the one, true King. Some followers of Jesus really like the thought of being a part of the Body of Christ. It sounds so mystical and spiritual! But – frankly – they don't think it's important to be a vital part of any local congregation anywhere. Sadly, they miss the obvious. You can only ever experience being a part of the Body of Christ in this life by

being a vital part of a little “c” church just like Karl Road Baptist Church. Today’s passage reveals at least three basic facts about Jesus’ church. First of all...

### **IN JESUS’ CHURCH, THERE MUST BE UNITY.**

Look again with me at v. 3: “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.” (Eph 4:3 NLT) Did you notice a wonderful assumption there? The church already has unity because of Jesus. On any given Sunday, we have unity in this church whether or not it looks or feels like it. The encouragement is to “keep” united not “get” united - maintain unity not go out and create unity. How do we do that? It means we work hard at making the spiritual reality of our unity in Jesus a visible reality. We are one in Christ. That’s a spiritual fact. But we have to work at fleshing that out in the visible world of this congregation day after day, year in and year out.

Someone might say, “But, Rick, I see lots of differences here in people’s ages, in background, in ethnicity, in life experiences, in opinions and beliefs. Where’s the unity?” Paul mentions no less than seven powerful examples or marks of unity in these verses. Observe them with me. First, we are one body in Christ. “For there is one body...” (Eph 4:4 NLT) Think of Jesus being the head or the brain, and all the members and friends of this church making up the different parts of His body. True, all the body parts are different, but what unites us is our relationship to the head – to Jesus. The moment you put your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, yes, you became like a part of His Body in big “C” church. But that only ever becomes visible when you become an active, functioning part of an actual, visible little “c” church. If it’s true spiritually, make it true visibly.

Secondly, we are one in the Holy Spirit. “For there is one body and one Spirit...” (Eph 4:4 NLT) The same Holy Spirit dwells in the spirit of every follower of Jesus. This is not a unity of opinion, of feelings, or of interests. It’s a unity that comes from sharing the same Person – the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit cannot create division or act harshly. Where the Holy Spirit is in charge, there is peace. “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.” (Eph 4:3 NLT) If it’s true spiritually, make it true visibly. Third, we have one hope. “... just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.” (Eph 4:4 NLT) Every follower of Jesus is looking forward to the same thing: an eternal relationship with God Himself in a new Heavens and a new Earth. We have the same goal, the same purpose and the same future. If it’s true spiritually, make it true visibly.

Fourth, we have one Lord. “There is one Lord...” (Eph 4:5 NLT) That’s Jesus. He alone has the power to bring together people who would otherwise never give each other the time of day. When David, one of the great Bible characters in the Old Testament, was hiding from King Saul who was trying to kill him, he gathered all sorts of men to himself who would have likely hated each other in any other scenario. Under David’s leadership, they became a unified and potent fighting

force. When David became king of Israel, many of them became his trusted advisors. What held this group together? David. Their differences became somehow secondary and unimportant to David and his mission. Their eyes were on David not themselves. Because they loved and served their king – David – they didn't waste time and energy being enemies of one another. That's the way it is with Jesus and His people – or it should be! The differences between us are so very small in comparison to the greatness of worshipping and serving the one, true King – the Lord Jesus Christ. If it's true spiritually, make it true visibly.

Fifth, we have one faith. “There is one Lord, one faith...” (Eph 4:5 NLT) Christians will never agree on every doctrine or how to interpret every verse in the Bible. Why, I've heard that where there are just even two Baptists there are likely to be three opinions! But true followers of Jesus agree that the Bible is God's Word, that God is a gracious and loving Father, that we must trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus in order to be saved and that the Holy Spirit will help us grow in our faith every day. If it's true spiritually, make it true visibly.

Sixth, there is one baptism. “There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” (Eph 4:5 NLT) You might want to argue that one with Paul, yes? Churches practice baptism differently. There's believers' baptism, infant baptism, baptism by immersion once, baptism by immersion three times, baptism by sprinkling, baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and baptism in the name of Jesus only – just to name a few different varieties! One baptism? But, you know, so what? Isn't baptism – however understood or practiced – a practice that identifies a person as belonging to Jesus? If it's true spiritually, make it true visibly. Seventh, we have one God and Father of all. “...and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.” (Eph 4:6 NLT) Every genuine follower of Jesus worships and serves the same God. Every child of God has the same Father. That means we're brothers and sisters in Christ forever even if you don't want to be! If it's true spiritually, make it true visibly.

So, there you have it: seven reasons why we already enjoy a fundamental spiritual unity. Done. Finished. Accomplished. But, of course, even a profound spiritual unity can be enhanced or diminished. Paul anticipated that when he says, “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.” (Eph 4:2 NLT) All you have to do is think of the opposite of what Paul lists here and you'll discover what destroys the unity of this or any church all too quickly. When people are proud instead of humble, unity suffers. When people are harsh with one another, unity suffers. When people fail to give each other the benefit of the doubt, or write each other off, or blow each other out of the water, unity suffers. I guarantee that if you hang out in any church for very long, someone will inevitably hurt your feelings. Just because you go to church doesn't mean you stop being a sinner! And that's true of other people, too. Practice humility. Practice gentleness. Practice patience. Practice love. Even though we are indeed one in Jesus, we have to keep working at making that unity something visible, real and ongoing.

I love the story of what happened one regular Sunday morning at just a regular church. One of the choir members – a tenor – had a solo special music offering. He started off poorly and it went from bad to worse. People in the congregation started pulling out their hymnals to locate the hymn he was singing. By the second verse, the congregation had joined the soloist in the hymn. By the third and fourth verses, he was starting to get his act together and the song was starting to sound pretty good. And on the fifth verse, the congregation was absolutely silent and that tenor sang the most beautiful solo of his life. That's a picture of what life in the Body of Christ ought to be like – enabling one another to sing whatever tune Jesus has given us to sing. Here's a second basic fact...

### **IN JESUS' CHURCH, THERE MUST BE DIVERSITY.**

Paul writes, "However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ." (Eph 4:7 NLT) Paul just touches on here what he discusses in greater detail in other New Testament letters. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this point today. Simply put: unity in Jesus doesn't require uniformity or conformity. In fact, real godly unity demands an amazing diversity. I hate to have to define my words, but because that word "diversity" is so big in our culture right now, it invites misunderstanding. Friends, I'm not talking about sexual diversity, or moral diversity or diversities in lifestyle choices.

The kind of godly diversity that Jesus' church must celebrate is racial, cultural, socioeconomic, age, and spiritual maturity diversity. Godly diversity just doesn't require all Christians to look, think, act, and talk the same! In a few minutes, we're going to share Communion together. As we do that, take a moment to observe the diversity even in this local expression of the Body of Christ. This is easily the most diverse congregation I've ever been a part of! I think it's wonderful, even though it can be stretching and challenging at times. And, frankly, I envision greater diversity in our church's future not less. Not only do we have people from different parts of the city, but different parts of America, and even different parts of the world. We come from different backgrounds and have different jobs. We have different educational and economic levels. Some of us have been Baptist all of our lives. Others of us have no understanding of what it means to be a Baptist Christian and, frankly, could care less!

A healthy, Spirit-filled unity allows for amazing diversity. Have you ever looked out on a forest and tried to count all the different shades of green that you see? Try it sometime and you'll give up after awhile! Yes, it's all green; nevertheless, there are an almost infinite number of different shades of green. The greens don't clash. No green ends up being "ungreen", "non-green", "anti-green" or more green than all the other greens. If God can do that with a forest of trees, how much more is He capable of balancing unity with diversity in His church? That brings me to a third basic fact about Jesus' church in these verses.

### **IN JESUS' CHURCH, THERE MUST BE ACTIVITY.**

The best place where godly diversity can be seen is in the area of spiritual gifts. We've all been given different spiritual gifts. And spiritual gifts are all about godly activity. Here's a simple definition of a spiritual gift. It's a significant ability given by the Holy Spirit that serves Jesus and His church in some way. Paul actually identifies a few of them in v. 11, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers." (Eph 4:11 NLT) Other examples in the Bible include leadership, musical or artistic ability, administration, encouragement and compassion.

I want to leave you with a four key facts about spiritual gifts that are either explicitly mentioned or implied in v. 7-16. First, every follower of Jesus has spiritual gifts. "However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ." (Eph 4:7 NLT) Utilizing the analogy of each one of us being a body part in the Body of Christ, Paul adds, "As each part does its own special work...." (Eph 4:16 NLT) Every single one of us here today has some Holy Spirit-given ability to share with this local congregation that can build it up and make it more effective for Jesus in this community. Do you know your spiritual gifts? Do you know how to use them? Are you using your spiritual gifts here or are you just content being a "pew potato"?

Second, every spiritual gift is an expression of God's grace. Another translation of v. 7 puts it like this, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Eph 4:7 NIV) There is a kind of grace that God extends to you the moment you trust Jesus as your Lord and Savior. That grace saves you from Hell and opens the door of Heaven to you. But there's a different kind of grace that God gives you that enables you to serve – to help build up Jesus' church in some way. Third, only Jesus decides what spiritual gifts you are given - not your pastor, not your parents, and not some well meaning fellow Christian! "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." (Eph 4:7 NIV) In addition, Paul says about the specific gifts he mentions in v. 11, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church...." (Eph 4:11 NLT) By the way, that's Paul's whole point in that kind of odd sounding segment in v. 8-10. Like a conquering general, King Jesus brings back the spoils of war and gives gifts to His followers – you and me. Even you yourself don't get to choose or decide your spiritual gifts. No, instead you discover them and put them to use them to His glory!

Fourth, the purpose of using your spiritual gift is to build up Jesus' church by helping to move people towards spiritual maturity. All of that is found in v. 11 -13, "Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ." (Eph 4:11-13 NLT) Isn't it the pastor's job, the paid staff's job or the Ministry Council's job to build up the church? Not according to those

verses! Actually, my primary job – and the job of every leader in this church paid or volunteer - is to equip you to build up Jesus' church! The Greek word for "equip" means to set someone's broken leg or arm. It means to put something back into the condition it ought to be in so it can function properly. My job – and the job of other staff and leaders - is not to monopolize all the ministry that can be done in this place, but to multiply the opportunities to do ministry in and through this place. Personally, nothing gives me greater joy as a pastor than to help a fellow brother and sister in Christ discover how God has gifted you and then turn you loose for the Lord! I know that the more you discover your spiritual gifts and use them, the more this church will be built up.

But notice the ultimate goal. It's pretty explicit there in v. 13. "This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ." (Eph 4:13 NLT) What should be the goal of KRBC? Not a full sanctuary. Not a music program that's the best in the city. Not even feeding the poor. Our ultimate goal should be to see an increasing number of men, women, boys and girls in Northland and beyond put their trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord and then become His fully devoted followers – that's what it means to be "mature in the Lord." As you heard at the Family Gathering two weeks ago and in other places, that's exactly why we are putting a renewed emphasis on discipleship and disciple-making. Just call it Christianity 101. It's just very basic Christianity that goes right back to Ephesians 4. If you have a growing interest in helping us figure out what discipleship and disciple-making should look like here at KRBC, please talk to me or Glenn Myres – another leader who has a passionate interest in discipleship. But here are a few questions I would leave with all of you to ponder personally. Do you know your spiritual gifts? If you know your spiritual gifts, do you have a growing sense of how God might use those gifts at KRBC to bring men, women, boys and girls to Jesus and then grow them up to maturity in Jesus?

Before Cody Huff became a member at Central Christian Church in Las Vegas, he was sleeping in an open field next to the church. Cody had been making lots of money as a famous bass pro fisherman. But he couldn't overcome his problem with drugs. His crack cocaine addiction led him to smoke away \$600,000 worth of savings, his house, his Harley, and his new boat. He smoked away everything he had and ended up homeless. But God would turn his life around—and it all started with the kindness of a church volunteer using her spiritual gifts of hospitality and mercy. Some people from the church's homeless ministry were handing out sandwiches in the park where Cody slept, and they told him he could get a shower at Central Christian Church. The last place Cody wanted to go was a church, but he hadn't bathed in so long that even other homeless men couldn't stand his smell anymore.

Cody walked into the church and a lady named Michelle, who knew him from the homeless ministry, said, "Good morning, Cody. How are you?" Then she looked

at him and said, "Cody, you need a hug." Cody said, "You don't want to touch me because I haven't had a shower in 3 months." But Michelle walked up, looked him in the eyes, gave him a big hug and told him that Jesus loved him. Cody says, "In that split second, I was somebody. She even remembered my name. That was the point where I knew that God was alive in this world." Over the next several weeks, Cody's life began to be restored. He gave his life to Christ. He started leading a Bible study in the park for other homeless people. Three years later Cody was married, and he and his wife serve faithfully in the church's homeless ministry every weekend. He has his own business. It's a story of restoration and transformation. And it all started because a church volunteer used her spiritual gifts of caring and compassion to point Cody Huff to Jesus.

You don't have to be a pastor to point someone to Jesus. Or an amazing evangelist. Or a leader in the church. You simply need to have a growing awareness of how God has gifted you and then, most importantly, a willingness to be used by Him to point people to Jesus and help them to mature into His devoted followers. An important part of your identity as a child of the one, true King is your calling to help build Jesus' church.