

6 The Church

Ephesians 4:1-16

Everyone is talking about the church. How does a church grow? What is the biblical structure for the church? What is the role of spiritual gifts in the body? How can we build biblical fellowship? How can the church be prophetic in our society? Books and articles addressing these and related issues have flooded the market in recent years. But perhaps the greatest need of the church today is to come to a renewed understanding of its own identity as the people of God. The book of Ephesians speaks to the crucial question of the nature and function of the church.

1. What has helped your church or fellowship group the most in promoting unity?

2. Read Ephes. 4:1-16. Identify and briefly comment on the qualities Paul urges us to exemplify in our relationships (Ephes. 4:1-3).

3. William Barclay depicts the relationship between first-century Jews and Gentiles as follows: "The Jews had an immense contempt for the Gentiles and considered them as 'created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell.'"² Against this background, describe the difficulties Jewish and Gentile Christians would face in seeking to maintain unity.

What similar tensions in the church today make it difficult to "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"?

4. How can Paul's description of the body of Christ, the church, motivate us to live in unity (Ephes. 4:4-6)?

² William Barclay, *Daily Bible Study*, p. 125

- 5.** Ephes. 4:7-10 describes Christ as a triumphant conqueror who distributes gifts, the spoils of victory, to his people. What is the nature and purpose of the gifts Christ has given to the church (Ephes. 4:11-13)?

- 6.** For many Christians, church is simply a place to sit under the ministry of gifted individuals (Ephes. 4:11). How is this concept a distortion of our role as God's people (Ephes. 4:12-13)?

- 7.** What is God's goal for the church according to Ephes. 4:13-16?

- 8.** What are the differences between spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity (Ephes. 4:13-16)?

- 9.** What winds and waves are blowing and tossing the church today (Ephes. 4:14)?

- 10.** Why are spiritually mature Christians better able to withstand false teaching and "the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephes. 4:14)?

- 11.** Why is the balance of truth and love so essential as we seek to help others grow in Christ (Ephes. 4:15)?

- 12.** Paul mentions that each part must do its work in order for the body to grow and build itself up in love (Ephes. 4:16). What work has God called you to do at the present time?

13. How has this passage helped you to understand the nature and purpose of a healthy church?

14. How has it helped you to better understand your own place in the church?