

"...THE WHOLE BODY, FITTED AND KNIT TOGETHER..." EPHESIANS 4:16

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KNIT Together

The Essence and Calling of the Church

July 12-16, 2021

Introduction

"But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head — Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and KNIT TOGETHER by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part."

Ephesians 4:15-16, CSB

The Church is born as it receives the proclamation of Christ's good news, and the Church grows as this good news, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, sinks in and flows out of its life and speech. This life-giving news is that God, through Christ, is drawing and reconciling all things to Himself (Eph 1:10). And the Church is that "called out" and gathered community which has yielded itself in faith to God's reconciling, unifying work... and now joins Him in it (2 Cor 5:18-19). The Church, by its connection to Christ, is at the spearhead of God's grand re-creation, and one day all the broken pieces of our sin-fractured universe will be swept up and reforged as one kingdom under the glorious and eternal reign of God.

Through the completed work of Christ on the cross and the continuing work of the Spirit within and through the Church, God is patiently unraveling all of the knots and is working a new thread into our frayed fabric: an enlivening Thread that will one day be worked into the fabric of all of the creation that groans and longs for the redemptive

prick of God's needle. To be united to Christ is, therefore, to be interwoven and united with all others whom He has reconciled to Himself as His beloved community. In Him, all relationships are being set right because they are being cleansed of sin and worshipfully reoriented around our glorious and all-sufficient God. Christ is our Head, and we the redeemed are the interconnected members of His one Body.

Furthermore, to be incorporated into Christ's Body is to receive His reconciling pulsebeat as our own: to reach out and become His ministers of reconciliation to the dying world that has yet to hear and receive the good news of His redemption. Yes, we are united for worship, but we are also united for mission: both are oriented around the proclamation and embodiment of the good news, around "speaking the truth in love." Christ has opened the way for us to be reunited with our heavenly Father, and as we accept our Father's embrace and receive His love, we adopt His love for an estranged world that is longing for good news... for reunion. We must each find our proper place within Christ's Body, so that we can work as one to grow the Body by reconciling others to Christ.

- Monday – **"The Master Weaver"**
- Tuesday – **"The Tragic Tear & the Redeeming Thread"**
- Wednesday – **"The Weaver's Helper"**
- Thursday – **"Embracing the Pattern & Loosening Old Knots"**
- Friday – **"The Deep Weave & the Reinforcing Thread"**

Monday

Text: Ephesians 1

For Further Reflection:

- Read 1:1-2. As we see in this opening greeting, the church is a place where people's core identity is seen through the lens of God and his work, and it is a place where people genuinely desire God's grace and peace upon each other. *In what ways do you talk about your (and other's) identity and work through the lens of Christ, and how are you desiring God's grace and peace to shower upon every person within your congregation? Do we communicate these things in our normal, day-to-day conversations with each other?*
- Read 1:3-8. List all the things that are happening "in" and "through" Christ, note who is doing the action, and notice how each action shows God's desire for us to be brought near to himself. *When is the last time you thanked Christ for getting you and your spiritual siblings out from under the crushing debt and poverty of your sin (v. 7), and into the arms of God?*
- Read 1:9-14. Notice how the opening of God's floodgates of grace is tied to the unveiling of God's mysterious heart as revealed in the life and work of Christ. When God opens our eyes to his unthinkable Christ-centered plan that he has taken such delight in (i.e., the gospel), it is at that moment that he opens us to his life-giving grace. God's grace is linked to the giving and receiving of his gospel. *What did it take for you to see Christ's gospel as good, and what are you doing to convince those around you of its goodness and beauty and truth? How is God's work in the life of your church getting people to talk positively about (i.e., praise) God's radiant glory?*
- Read 1:15-19. Even though Paul can already see the fruit that the gospel is producing in the Ephesians' lives, he still pleads to God that God would open their eyes even more to the depths and riches of his gospel. *In what ways do we become content with our "saving knowledge" of Christ and lose our thirst for a deeper knowledge of God, his hope, his inheritance, and his power towards us? How are we pleading for each other to ever grow in this delightful, life-giving knowledge of God & his gospel?*
- Read 1:20-23. The church is crucial to God's plan to fill all things with the fullness of the resurrected Christ. *What part does the church play in your own life? your community?*

Tuesday

Text: Ephesians 2

For Further Reflection:

- Read 2:1-10. By looking back and reminding ourselves of the helpless state we have come from, we can see Christ's resurrection power already at work, bringing our dead, sinful selves to life as we become united with him through his beautiful act of grace. From this point of redemption, he is offering us endless ages upon ages to explore the unfathomable excesses of his kind, saving grace. *What were you like before you met Christ, and what difference has Christ actually made in your life? What difference has he made recently? How can the members of your church share the daily miracles of redemption that Christ is working in your lives, so that we can draw each other and the world into the praise of his glory?*
- Read 2:11-16. Out of an alienated, fragmented and mutually hostile humanity, Christ has drawn us and knit us together with himself and with each other. He has forged this new, durable union and peace with his own blood. With his blood he has drafted and ratified a new constitution by which this new, united humanity will live. *Are there any old hostilities or divisions (cultural, denominational, racial, economic, political, etc.) that you and your local church tend to import into the new blood-forged family of Christ? What have you learned from a Christian whose background is different from yours? What role do you think you have in breaking down barriers and living under the healing power of Christ's new covenant?*
- Read 2:17-22. Equal treatment, equal access, equal citizenship, equal membership within God's household. There is no "insider class" or "second class" in Christ's rewoven humanity; this grand re-leveling has occurred because the foundation has been reset around the new Cornerstone. Like patches being brought near to each other and to the Thread that holds them together, we will be brought near to the grand Weaver when he puts his finished garment on. How do you respond to being a part of God's new society? What happens to a church when it is out of step with Christ's reconciling work?

Wednesday

Text: Ephesians 3

For Further Reflection:

- Read 3:1-6. Paul is bound as God's emissary to the outsider, delivering the Weaver's wonderful proclamation of full inclusion to those who were once far off. The mystery revealed in the gospel of Christ is the mystery of true reconciliation and unity; it is a mystery so beautiful that unless an emissary were sent, no one would ever deduce it or believe it. *Whom within your church is being called to be an ambassador to the outsider, and how can the church support them and join them in this vital ministry?*
- Read 3:7-13. God has endowed Paul – formerly an insider of insiders – with a special gift and calling as his new ambassador of the gospel to the outsider. In God's sending of the "insider" to the "outsider" with God's unthinkable message of full inclusion, the messenger himself becomes a shining embodiment of the very message he proclaims, the rays of which reach even those authorities who are in the highest of places. To bare such an embodied message has brought suffering to Paul, because those who are invested in the old, fragmented system are violently resistant. But his embodied suffering only exposes the englorious gospel all the more. *What perceived "insider" status could you intentionally lay aside in order to better embody God's welcoming heart towards the outsider?*
- Read 3:14-21. Paul bursts back into his prayer for the Ephesians. His gospel message compels him to plead to God for his newly adopted siblings, that they may grow deeper and deeper into the power, nearness, love, and knowledge of Christ through the Spirit. As God answers this gospel prayer in unimaginable ways within his church, it will expose his glory to the watching world. *Over the past year, what growth has God accomplished within your church, and how has that exposed God's glory? How can we pray for more?*

Thursday

Text: Ephesians 4:1-5:20

For Further Reflection:

- Read 4:1-6. God has already knit all of his children together spiritually as one body in Christ (v. 4-6), and now we are called to live in a way that is consistent with that spiritual reality (v. 3, 13). The visible unity of Christ's body displays a core attribute of God: our triune God's oneness. The high calling of God's church is for us to become more and more like him in his oneness. *How have you experienced the oneness of Christ's body (the church) as a present spiritual reality, and to what extent have you experienced Christian unity as a lofty goal that the church has to intentionally work towards (vv. 3, 13)?*
- Read 4:7-16. When Christ descended into our low estate and then ascended back on high, he swept away all that which enslaved us and left behind a treasure trove of gifts which has equipped the church for its immensely high calling of growing and serving and upbuilding Christ's body into the unity that Christ has already forged for us. Each of the five gifts mentioned are gospel-intensive roles within the church which build upon each other's work: apostles are sent out to the ones who are far off, prophets then deliver the good and sharp Word of God, evangelists are there to help people see that word as good news, shepherds are those come alongside and lead people out from darkness and into gospel living, and teachers are there to ever expand people's knowledge of our infinitely good and loving God. All are essential and overlap. Together, they will ground the church in the gospel as its prime doctrine in the midst of other doctrinal winds so that we can constantly be speaking the unifying, lifegiving truth of the gospel into each other's lives. *How have you seen God endow your church with these five gospel-centered leadership roles, and how have you seen these ministries knit and sanctify the church towards its full stature in Christ? Who in your church (including yourself) has which gift, and how can you support and join them in their work?*
- Read 4:17-24. Christ, by knitting us together with himself and each other through these five gospel dispensations, leads his people in an actual exodus from their past lives of futility, ignorance, alienation, hard-heartedness, corrupted desires, and sin, and into the re-creation of their whole selves into the likeness of God. As he enables us to truly put away all those things which once captivated and blinded and killed us, so we must truly allow ourselves to be set apart and embrace the abundant life and calling he has called us to. *On a scale from 1-10, 10 being the most pure behavior and 1 being the least, how would you rate the church today? According to vv. 20-24, what is the process of moral education that is needed to improve the situation, and what is your part to play in this process?*

- Read 4:25-32. Here are nitty gritty specifics of what it looks like for an empowered people to start living up to their high calling by centering themselves around their new identity in Christ: they will naturally turn from falsehood to truth, from retaining to releasing anger, from stealing to working and sharing, from evil to gracious talk, from bitterness and malice to tenderheartedness and forgiveness. *To which of these areas of sin are you most vulnerable, and how are they symptoms of a shallow belief in the gospel? How does your identity in Christ affect the way you want to live?*
- Read 5:1-7. You cannot hold to the old patterns while being woven into the new fabric of Christ at the same time; something will tear. God has opened up himself for us to imitate; Christ and his sacrificial love is the supreme pattern into which we are being drawn. If we retain the old ways and remain enamored by the lesser things, if all we can talk about are the lesser things, then we will end up closing ourselves off to the glorious inheritance that God has prepared for his children, and we will experience the tearing of our lives from God's as wrath. *How would you counsel someone who is struggling to break away from a certain pattern of sin in their lives? How is the gospel of Jesus a far better thing to give a sinner than the "gospel" of a self-help regimen?*
- Read 5:8-14. The light of Christ shining into our lives transforms us into light itself, and brings forth all sorts of good fruit. In the darkness is only barrenness, futile efforts, and death. We, being transformed into light by Christ's light, are to expose those dark places to the light of Christ. We expose the futile deeds of darkness, not by taking part in them nor even by focusing our talk on them, but by focusing our talk on Christ and how he frees us from such things. *How has your reception of Christ's light led to you becoming Christ's light? What are ways we can "expose" the unfruitful deeds of darkness (v. 11) without even "mentioning" them (v. 12)? What are some of the most beautiful responses you have seen when you speak Jesus into the dark deeds of another person?*
- Read 5:15-20. We are to be gospel-wise people who intentionally live against the flow of the evil days in which we find ourselves. As we acquaint ourselves more with the beautiful heart of God, we will find ourselves turning from the numbing frivolities and excesses of our times to embrace the eye-opening joys of the Spirit. The fruit of such an alert joy will be a united and indomitable lifesong of thanks to God from the church. *What specifically does it look like to stay joyfully and fruitfully alert to the good things of God in these evil days? How have you been tempted to turn your eyes to mind-numbing frivolities in response to all the evil, and what has helped you sing your most persistent and durable songs of thanks to God? How have you been able to interweave your song with your brothers' and sisters'?*

Friday

Text: Ephesians 5:21-6:24

For Further Reflection:

- Read 5:21-24. The gospel-wise life will start manifesting itself in the most intimate of life settings: the home. Each role within the household is designed to depict unique facets of the pattern of Christ, and when all threads follow their respective patterns, it will create the most spectacular gospel tapestry for the world to behold. The overriding Christ-pattern that all household threads are to embrace is that of mutual submission (v. 21), and in vv. 22-24 we see specifically how the wife is to embrace this pattern in how she interacts with the headship of her husband. *Who have been the most Christ-depicting wives you have ever observed, and how has their example impacted your own life?*
- Read 5:25-33. The husband works out his side of the mutual submission (v. 21) between husband and wife as the other half of the Christ-pageant of marriage, so that the marriage can fully depict the beautiful love story between Christ and his church. Husbands play their unique role by lavishing the same kind of humbling, sacrificial, self-giving, sanctifying, uniting, empathetic love that Christ has poured out on the church. *Who have been the most Christ-depicting husbands you have observed, and how has their example impacted your own life? Which have been the marriages that have most accurately depicted Christ and his church, and how has their embodied gospel shaped you?*
- Read 6:1-9. Paul completes his tour of the gospel-wise and Christ-depicting household tapestry by exploring the other two kinds of relationships which were common in the first century household: the child-parent and slave-master relationships. In Christ, the old power dynamics between “superior” and “inferior” are transformed into relationships of mutual love and submission. Children are to lavish obedience and honor towards their parents, and parents are to nurture their children with the same kind of restorative discipline and loving instruction which the Lord has showered upon us. Slaves are called to embody their obedience to Christ in their obedience to their masters, and both slave and master must lavish towards one another the same kind of enthusiastic, genuine, and heartfelt service which Christ showed them. Both are to look at all their Christlike service towards one another as service to God, the great Master of all. *In what ways have you witnessed the gospel transform and reweave the power structures of this world into beautiful, Christlike relationships of mutual submission? What does gospel-centered parenting look like? How have you seen*

Christian business leaders selflessly serve their employees, and what evangelistic opportunities has that witness unlocked?

- Read 6:10-17. We are not called to struggle against any other human being, but for them. The real war is against “the cosmic powers of this present darkness.” In order to take this stand, we must continually wrap ourselves with the truth, righteousness, gospel readiness, faith, salvation, and word of God: the gospel of Christ. *How can we daily envelop ourselves and each other in Christ’s gospel, as Paul did the Ephesians in ch. 1-3? What has it looked like for you to fight for people with the gospel?*
- Read 6:18-24. Paul begins to end his letter with one final plea: that the Ephesians would knit themselves to God and each other through an immersive, gospel-centered prayer life, praying for boldness in their gospel battles. Not only has Paul’s written letter worked to knit himself and the Ephesians closer to each other in Christ, but so has the embodied presence of Tychicus as an apostolic representative and gospel encourager. Paul ends with a gospel benediction: that God through Christ would continue to knit the Ephesian community into his peace, love, faith, and grace. *How constant and deep is your communication with God? How centered are your prayers on the gospel battles that God has put before the church? How can we embody the close knit reality of Christ’s gospel community in tangible ways that overcome all kinds of barriers?*