

CHOSEN TO FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER

1. The Unity of the Body is created by Christ

Acts 2.42-47

What can we learn from this report on the early church?

Acts 11.1-3 What has changed? What was the core reason behind this change?

Acts 11.19-26 Tells us that God's hand was on the church in Antioch, and many Gentiles were being saved. The Jews, including Barnabas and Saul, came to realize that God loved Gentiles too.

There was a shift in thinking between problems and their solution – they realized that they were all one body. In a body, all members are important, they all belong to each other. There is one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism.

The key term for this relationship is 'In Christ'. For all to be in Christ, they must also be in a relationship with him and with each other. Ephesians tells us about many of the blessings we have received in Christ

Does this mean that we must all be the same?

Fortunately God loves variety, we can see from creation that he loves to create with great variety and beauty. Size, shape, colour, in plants, animals, insects and every part of his creation show he loves our individuality. Our gifts, our experiences, all enhance the body.

If our keyboard has a broken key, we notice the difference – it hinders the reader's understanding. So if one member of the body isn't functioning, the body suffers.

Has anyone ever had a sore toe? Or finger? Or eye? Or.....? Then you know how the body needs each part.

All of us are precious, vital for the body to work at its peak.

Jeremiah 1.5. Are we all working in the way God formed us to work, do you think?

Ephesians 1.4,11-12. What are we chosen to do and to be?

When Jesus was on earth, his ears heard..... his eyes saw..... his hands..... His feet..... his mouth..... (Fill in the gaps)

He calls us to do what he did.

2. Love of the Body is commanded by Christ

We are commanded to love one another. Hebrews 10.25 – what is the key word here?

Romans 12.10 – How can we honour one another? Who do people honour most in this world? What do they honour – position, possessions.....?

Why should we honour each other? 1 Corinthians 6.20, 7.23

We are valuable to God, and should be valuable to each other. John 3.6 – Jesus tells Nicodemus that we must be born of the Spirit. God is in us, and he is love, Romans 5.5 tells us the source of the love we must share.

If we don't love our brothers and sisters in Christ, there is something wrong, God is our Father, we are one family. As we love the Father, so we love his children.

3. Criticism of the Body is offensive to Christ

Romans 14.13.

We are to stop passing judgment, making distinction between people. There is a challenge in coping with diversity. It was a problem in the early church and still is today. Age – physical or spiritual. Background – traditional, Pentecostal, atheistic, Catholic, Orthodox..... There are challenges in developing relationships with each other.

Paul talks about two positions – either **strong** in faith, with confidence in our Christian liberty, or **weak** in faith, uncertain in Christian liberty.

Jews struggled with the idea that their holy days, their food laws, were not necessary for Gentiles to follow – or even for themselves in order to be saved. Acts 15.7-11 tells us the conclusions of the Apostles regarding circumcision and food laws.

Gentiles wondered whether they should eat food offered to idols. 1 Corinthians 8.7-13 deals with this problem. What is Paul's conclusion?

Many churches have faced splits due to criticism of others – how should such criticism be dealt with?

4. Paul's Three Principles

a. Accept one another Romans 14.1 Some things are disputed, one thinks something is right, another doesn't agree. Accept each other over minor things. What do you think is major? Or minor?

b. Avoid stumbling blocks Romans 14.20

Be considerate of someone else's conscience. Don't put stumbling blocks in people's ways.

How can we stumble people?

c.Work hard for unity. Romans 14.19 – 'Every effort' indicates hard work. We are called to build each other up, to encourage, strengthen and bless each other. How have others done this for you? How have you done it for others?

How do you define unity?

One definition: Each of us with our own 'flavour', together combined by the hands of the Creator into the 'delicious blend of unity',

Psalm 133

As we meet together, strengthen our relationship – over lunch, coffee, hospitality and what else?