



## 2023 3Q Ephesians—Lesson 7 The Unified Body of Christ

by Tim Jennings

### SABBATH

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Read Memory Text:

- It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV84).

What does this text mean to you? Does it have a principle contained in it that should inform us as to how we are to think of ourselves and others?

Does it say anything in regard to how we fill various roles and positions? Is it suggesting that if some are equipped to be prophets or apostles it would not be wise to put them in the role of housekeeper or cook? In other words, is the Bible suggesting that God equips people with different skills, abilities, talents, and when they are consecrated to Him then the body of Christ will function best when people fulfill the roles that they are best equipped to accomplish?

What is the principle that this Scripture is teaching for deciding upon whom gets placed in various positions? Isn't it their qualifications, abilities, gifting, talents, experience? Does the Bible teach that we place people in position of leadership based on race, say the Jewish converts get affirmatively chosen over the Gentile converts because they are Jewish not because of their gifting? If the Bible chose people to positively affirm them to the positions based on racial profiling, what would that be called? Affirmative action—just an example of how God's government and principles work differently than those of this world.

Only when we advance God's principles do we find healing. The methods of the state cannot heal and restore.

What happens if people become dissatisfied with their skill set, their calling, and focus on someone else's skillset and abilities and compare themselves to them? What happens if they become envious jealous, and begin complaining?

Is this a function of love—or is love not self-seeking and love does not envy?

So anti-love would seek to make the comparison to others and focusing on non-pertinent differences to appear righteous. Anti-love, which is evil, would seek to inflame envy, jealousy, and dissatisfaction, a sense of unfairness by introduce arbitrary measures and artificial values.



Have we seen activities or practices in the world, which does not operate on the principles of God, that goes against this biblical guidance? Have we seen anything in the world that suggests people should be placed in position based on attributes other than their qualifications?

These politically motivated practices are designed and intended to cause division in the populous, to create various affinity groups to be exploited by the self-proclaimed champions of that group. It is not about helping the masses in any of the various groups, it is about keeping society divided so power can be concentrated in the hands of a few ruling elites so they can dominate and control the masses. This is how the kingdoms of this world function, because all the kingdoms of the world are Satan's and run on Satan's principles. And Satan seeks to rise above others to rule over others.

Jesus did not think equality with God was something to be held on to, but humbled Himself, in other words, surrendered power, in order to uplift the masses and break down dividing walls and bring us into genuine unity where we are all empowered by God to fulfill His calling in our lives. God's kingdom does not function like the kingdoms of this world.

And Satan constantly seeks to get Christians to exchange the kingdom of God for kingdoms of this world—but all the kingdoms of this world function on the same power over others, imposed law, coercive methods with a few elites exploiting the masses for the benefit of the elites.

The methods of the world always results in abuse, dysfunction, inefficiency, and conflict in society.

So as Christians we cannot allow the lies, perversions, distortions, corruptions of the world into our minds, hearts, and practices. We cannot go along with falsehood because we fear what others think. We cannot accept any lie even if it is presented with the idea that it is compassionate, or loving, or fair.

The truth is, we are not all fit for every job or position. We all have equal value as human beings, and in a just worldly society all will have equal opportunity to pursue whatever job, role, or position they choose. But that doesn't mean we are all equal in ability, talent, experience, motivation, drive, commitment, qualifications—and therefore despite pursuing a position, if filling that position is determined by objective qualifications we do not all have the same likelihood of getting that position.

When we are surrendered to Jesus in faith, we trust Him with the outcomes, we know He sees a million variables we cannot see, and when we don't get some outcome we thought was right for us, we don't get hurt, or angry, or jealous, we say to Jesus, "Thank you, for while I cannot see the reason things have gone this way right now, I know that you are good, and I know that you have your hand over my life, and I know that you just protected me from something that I didn't even know. How good you are to me. Keep leading in my life Lord, and open my eyes to the next step you would have me take." Faith in Jesus and love for God and others destroys the envy and jealousy that Satan tries to infect our hearts with.



## SUNDAY

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The lesson goes on to say that when we are converted and become part of the body of Christ there is a unity that is experienced, we practice the virtues that result in unity. They list three virtues: humility, gentleness, and patience.

What do you understand humility to be?

Read the third paragraph,

Paul elsewhere explains the term humility, in Ephesians 4:2 (ESV; “lowliness” in NKJV), by adding the idea to “count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3, ESV). Humility, then, may be understood not as a negative virtue of self-deprecation (see Col. 2:18, 23) but as a positive one of appreciating and serving others. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 57).

The lesson suggests that humility is appreciating and serving others? Any thoughts about this?

My view is that humility is the result, the fruit, of God’s design laws operating in the heart.

- Love: When we have the law of love operating in our hearts, we are not arrogant, rude, or prideful, we don’t seek to rule over others, we respect the individuality of others, we have a desire in our hearts for their welfare, their development, their salvation.
- Truth: When we have the law of truth operating in our hearts, we realize that we are finite and no matter what we know, we only know in part, our understanding is limited. Thus, we don’t judge others, we don’t know their circumstances, motives, and struggles. We choose to give people the benefit of the doubt and not think the worst. And when we do see actions that are objectively wrong, harmful, destructive, we grieve for the other person because we know they are hardening their heart, searing their conscience, and ruining their soul. We remember the truth that they are suffering from the same sin condition that we were also born with, and as the saying goes “but for the grace of God there go I.”
- Liberty: The law of liberty, we remember the Sabbath—the day God rested, the day God ceased using His power—the day God refused to force Lucifer into line; the day God refused to impose laws upon His creatures; the day God refused to inflict punishments for disobedience. And we live out God’s law of love by living and speaking the truth while we leave others free. We don’t take the arrogant position that we know what is best for another person’s life. We would not presume to judge someone who eats meat because we don’t know their physiology and genetics. We would not be so arrogant as to believe that we know what medicine is best for another mentally competent adult and we would never use our power, position, or authority to pressure or coerce people into taking an experimental medicine because we think we know what is best for them. We remain humble enough to recognize we cannot make that choice for another person.



## MONDAY

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Read Ephesians 4:4-6:

- There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6 NIV84).

The lesson points out that Paul lists seven “ones”

1. One body
2. One Spirit
3. One hope
4. One Lord
5. One faith
6. One baptism
7. One God and Father of all

What is this significance of this?

Seven is the number of spiritual completion—and thus choosing seven “ones” is a way of saying that we are spiritually complete in Christ, a complete restoration to the unity and oneness that God designed for His kingdom.

Let’s go through them one at a time and discuss what they mean:

1. One body
  - What is the body? It is the church—is that a denomination?
  - Who is part of that one body, the church?
  - How does one become part of that body?
  - Are we part of the body of Christ simply by being born into the world, or does it require some change in us? What is that change?
  - Are there other Bible metaphors that describe the body of Christ?
    - The vine and branches—which is a way of describing a family tree. Only those who are grafted into Christ become part of the body, or part of vine
    - The family of God—the family tree of God or the vine with its many branches. We are born into the human family descended from Adam, but only by rebirth are we connected to Jesus and become part of the heavenly family tree.
    - The sanctuary/temple—we are building blocks or stones being built together into a house for the Lord, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. And can any stone in the world become part of this temple? Yes—but can any stone in the world be part of God’s temple as it is, when it is found and picked up by the Builder who is God, or does the stone, the person, have to be prepared, shaped, honed, fitted for the building? Any human can become part of the temple, the family of God,



the church—but that requires that we are changed, reborn, transformed, honed, fitted, that we have sin, selfishness, the corrupt desires, practices, habits replaced with Christlike ones.

## 2. One Spirit

- What is the one Spirit? The Holy Spirit certainly, but
- Can Paul mean more than just God the Holy Spirit?
- What did Paul mean when he wrote to the Corinthians,
  - “Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit” (1 Corinthians 5:3 NIV84)?
- What did David mean when he prayed,
  - “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10 KJV)?
- Could the “one spirit” mean that when we are converted and have experienced the renewal of heart by the Holy Spirit, then we are reborn and have new hearts and right spirits, we have one spirit that is the spirit of love, honesty, integrity, loyalty to God and a spirit of faithfulness to Him and His design law and methods, that we are united in spirit by the Holy Spirit?

## 3. One hope

- What is our one hope? Jesus Christ!
- Why is there only one hope? Because Jesus is the only remedy to our terminal sin condition.
- Are there other Bible metaphors to describe this?
  - Narrow path versus wide path
  - One gate into the sheep pen (John 10:1-42)
  - One mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5)
- And what do we hope to receive through/from Jesus?

## 4. One Lord

- Who is our one Lord? Jesus.
- Isn't the Father and the Holy Spirit our Lord also? Or is Jesus our Lord in some way that the Father the Holy Spirit are not?
- I am not suggesting any differences in the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but I wonder, is there a functional, objective, reality-based distinction in what Jesus has done, some action, achievement, or accomplishment that Jesus has taken upon Himself to complete, and has completed, that places Him in the position as our Lord in a distinctly different way than the Father and the Holy Spirit?
- Does God's kingdom, the kingdom objective reality built by God, require human life to be in harmony with God and His design laws for life?
- Did Jesus take on the role and responsibility of becoming a real human being and as a human being using His human abilities to confront and overcome Satan and sin and restore God's perfect law into humanity and thereby develop a perfect, sinless, human character?
- Has Jesus become the second Adam, the new head of the human family?
- Is Jesus, then, our Lord, our Liege, our Champion, our King who sits on David's throne and reclaims Earth and all its domain from Satan and **places Earth back under the**



**sovereignty and governance of humanity—Jesus Christ King of kings and Lord of lords!**

5. One faith
  - What does one faith mean?
  - Does the context suggest it goes beyond personal saving faith in Jesus?
  - Does it mean a common belief, understanding, philosophy, and methodology based upon the principles of God and God's kingdom.
  - When Jesus is Lord, and the Holy Spirit transforms our hearts and spirits, do we begin to have common practices and principles?
  - And this is the fruit or result of God's living law being written into our hearts (Heb 8:10)
6. One baptism
  - What is this one baptism?
  - Is this referring to the ceremony with water?
  - Does one have to be baptized in water to be saved?
    - Thief on the cross
    - Enoch, Elijah, Daniel, and all those before Christ.
  - So, is this text referring to the ceremony with water or to what the water ceremony represents?
  - What does the water ceremony represent? The immersion of the self (heart and mind) into the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit where the entire sin-sick, selfish, self dies and is resurrected to a new life with a new heart and right spirit that loves God and others.
  - Can a person be saved without the water ceremony?
  - Can a person be saved without their hearts/minds being immersed in the Holy Spirit and being reborn? No, because that is what being saved or salvation actually means; it means to be healed, or renewed, or recreated in righteousness.
  - Does this mean that the water ceremony is unimportant and we don't need to do it? No—the ceremony is important. It is part of the process of how our choices and actions in responding to the truth help solidify the truth into our being. When we accept truth, we must put that truth into practice, and in so doing we are cooperating with God for our healing and transformation.
  - So how this works is that the baptism or immersing of the heart and mind by the Holy Spirit happens first, this cleanses and recreates the heart and the person is reborn into a new life in Christ. Then, with their new heart, the reborn Christian want to take a stand for God, they want to live out the truth of God, and thus they choose to be ceremonially baptized in water as a public witness to others. And in so doing they solidify into their own being their love, commitment, devotion, to God and demonstrate their willingness to follow where He leads. This helps them develop their faith relationship with God.
7. One God and Father of all
  - What does this mean?
  - Does this mean there is no Holy Spirit or that Jesus is not fully God?





- No, it means that the members of the Godhead have, amongst themselves, taken different roles in how they govern, and the Father has taken the role of being the Supreme Source of all. And we recognize Him as Sovereign.

Read last paragraph,

- Note carefully two ideas about the unity of the church (Eph. 4:1–6). First, unity is a spiritual fact, rooted in these seven “ones,” a reality to be celebrated (Eph. 4:4–6). Second, this unity requires our zeal to nurture and grow it (Eph. 4:3). There will often be cause to weep at our failings in actualizing this unity. However, whatever our failings, we should rejoice in the work of God-in-Christ in unifying the church, rejoicing in the theological reality of the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). Doing so will empower us to return to the hard work of advancing this unity but with fresh conviction that in doing so we are accomplishing God’s own work. (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 58).

How do we achieve unity in the church?

Can we ever achieve unity by imposing a list of rules? If it cannot be achieved in this way, what would it mean if people tried to achieve it in this way? That those pursuing unity through rules and authority and enforcement are immature, don’t understand reality, don’t understand God’s kingdom, and are implementing the principles of force and control which originate in Satan’s kingdom.

In his book, *Angry Saints*, George Knight, documents the history of the 1888 Minneapolis GC and describes that in the conflict between those who brought the righteousness by faith message, which is based upon design law, and the leadership who clung to imposed law, that the leadership led by Butler, repeatedly sought to get the delegates to vote and use authority of office to impose their conclusions on the church and force everyone to comply with what they thought was right. Jones and Waggoner did not use these methods. They used the methods of presenting their ideas in love, and inviting critique, and leaving everyone free to decide for themselves.

EGW sided with Jones and Waggoner, on multiple points, which included:

- Righteousness by faith
- The added law in Galatians included the Ten Commandments and is not just the ceremonial law
- And in opposing authoritarian methods to silence and force compliance

Sadly, the church rejected every one of these.

- The legalistic church leaders substituted legally declaring people righteous who are not righteous, for people becoming the righteousness of God as 2 Cor 5:21 teaches
- The legalistic leaders clung to teaching the imposed law view of the Ten Commandments, rather than recognizing the Ten Commandments have not always existed, do not reveal an



imposed legal form of governing by God, but were added as a helpful tool for sinful human beings to be accurately diagnosed and led back to Jesus for healing

- Legalistic leaders have continued to use the authority of office to silence, intimidate, and force their dogmas. This has created a selection bias in the church membership and church leadership in which the voices who are advancing light and truth are purged from the organized church and thus the church languishes in a false legally theology while it create the illusion of unity when what they have is authoritarian uniformity.

Can we achieve unity through public attestation to a common creed or a list of fundamental beliefs?

Can we achieve unity by the exercise of external might and power?

Can we achieve unity through legislation?

Can we achieve unity through majority vote? When the church votes in General Conference session on a certain doctrinal issue, does that vote cause unity among the members?

Is there a difference between unity and uniformity? What is the difference?

Jesus prayed,

- I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23 NIV84).

What is this unity, this oneness Jesus prayed for? How do we achieve this?

Is there some part of God's design, as taught in Scripture, that would enlighten us to this unity?

What about marriage? Did God create Adam and Eve as two separate individuals, who were to become one, to have unity?

And today, even in this sinful world, can a man and a woman, who have been reborn in godly love, come into the unity, the oneness that God designed?

So, if you have experienced that unity, that oneness, where two become one—how did that happen?

Can godly marital oneness be achieved through:





- Force?
- Rules?
- Imposed law?
- Threats?
- Punishments?
- External pressures?
- Declarations?
- Belief in a common list of doctrines?
- Being members of the same denomination?

How do two separate individuals become one in marriage?

They love the other more than self and unite their individualities upon common heavenly principles in which they value, cherish, and esteem the other more than themselves. They rejoice in and invest in the success of the other. They get real joy in doing for and uplifting their partner. They know each other intimately and each partner is trustworthy, reliable, mature and has the best interest of the other at the forefront of their motives. They are a united team that retain their individuality, their unique gifts, talents, abilities, and the two rejoice in their differences, learn to share in each other's preferences, give each other real freedom, and both are enriched by the differences in the other.

In our relationship with Jesus, we must love Him more than ourselves and value His design law methods and principles. We must then love others and rejoice in their success, seek to uplift others, but this doesn't mean we surrender our individuality to others and let others tell us what to do. That would be harmful to all parties. Jesus did not do what others told Him, and neither should we.

Unity doesn't mean uniformity, nor does it mean there are never any loving disagreements, differences of opinion, or heartfelt discussions.

Consider Abraham disagreeing with Jesus' plan to destroy Sodom, or Moses disagreeing with God's plan to wipe out Israel and start over with Moses. Think about Paul going to Jerusalem when God warned him repeatedly not to go because he would be arrested and killed. Their loving disagreement and discussions with God did not break up their unity with Him. In, fact, God called Abraham and Moses His friends and I believe it was because they retained their individuality and had such discussions with Him.

I value my wife because she has her own mind, her own individuality, her own perspectives. I would not want someone as my spouse who was only my shadow, only agreed with me in every detail. That would be boring, would have no depth, or substance, or interest. My life is enriched and more interesting because Christie has her own mind and way of seeing and doing things. Now, it is true that I don't agree with everything she says and she doesn't agree with everything I say, but I have learned to listen to her, to consider her insights, perspectives, and counsel. And I am a much wiser person today because I have learned from her. I would be less and our marriage would be less if either one of



us surrendered our individuality to the other and let the other do our thinking for us. Godly unity does not mean uniformity, it is the unity of love.

## TUESDAY

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Read Ephesians 4:7-10:

- But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (Ephesians 4:7-10 NIV84).

What does this mean to you?

My view is that this refers to Jesus’ condescension, as describe in Philippians 2:5-11:

- Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11 NIV84).

Jesus descended and then Jesus ascended and was exalted. And when Jesus ascended He took with Him the first fruits of His victory, those who were resurrected from the dead when Jesus died.

- At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matthew 27:51-53 NIV84).

We are not told who these individuals were. I suspect, that if they were to be witnesses to those living at that time then at least some of them had to be people who lived and died during the lifetime of those alive when they were resurrected.

However, I like to imagine that God the Father partially answered Jesus’ prayer from John 17 when Jesus prayed:



- “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24 NIV84).

And that the Father raised some of Jesus’ friends from the past to be with Jesus in heaven. I like to imagine that perhaps people like Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others were raised at this time. And these individuals are represented in Revelation 4:4:

- Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads (Revelation 4:4 NIV84).

The white robes represent the righteousness of Christ, and the gold crown represents the crown of victory the saints receive from Christ. So, these twenty-four elders represent saved human beings and not angels or other intelligent beings from other unfallen worlds.

And given the Bible only names three people taken to heaven, Enoch, Elijah, and Moses—yet here we have twenty-four elders described in Revelation. I don’t think it is too much of a stretch to consider the other seats are filled by those who were resurrected when Jesus died.

What does it mean that He gave gifts to men?

Most people understand this to be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which occurred at Pentecost.

Jesus said to His disciples before His crucifixion:

- I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (John 14:16-18 NIV84).

Was the Holy Spirit not in the world before Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Yes, David prayed that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him.

So, why didn’t the disciples experience the Holy Spirit more fully prior to Pentecost?

Consider this commentary from the book *The Desire of Ages*:

- Before this the **Spirit had been in the world**; from the very beginning of the work of redemption He had been moving upon men's hearts. **But while Christ was on earth, the disciples had desired no other helper.** Not until they were deprived of His presence would



they feel their need of the Spirit, and then He would come. (The Desire of Ages 669.1, emphasis mine).

The **Holy Spirit is Christ's representative**, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. **Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally.** Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be **His successor on earth.** No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. **By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all.** In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high (The Desire of Ages 669.2, emphasis mine).

I love this description—it is beautiful, it is powerful, and it is sensible. God would not give some advantage over another by limiting access to Jesus. Just think about it: On Earth today, what is it like to try and get access to someone powerful and famous? What would it be like if Jesus were on Earth today personally and there was no Holy Spirit to represent Him to everyone?

And when you read various descriptions about Jesus in heaven pleading for sinners—remember that Jesus said,

- “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, **the Spirit of truth, comes,** he will guide you into all truth. **He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears,** and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by **taking from what is mine and making it known to you** (John 16:12-14 NIV84, emphasis mine).

The Holy Spirit communicates to us what Jesus is speaking. When Jesus is pleading in heaven, He is pleading to you and me, He is pleading for us to trust Him. He is pleading for us to let Him save us, for us to stop listening to the lies of Satan, for us not to give into temptation, to not give in to the feelings of discouragement, to stop looking at the problems and keep our eyes fixed on Him our Savior and Deliverer.

And then, when we hear Jesus calling us and we respond to His love by opening our hearts in trust, we receive the Holy Spirit working within us to take what Christ achieved and reproduce it in us. We get new motives, new desires, and when we choose to act on those new motives, then we receive divine power to succeed. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit that makes the victory of Christ a reality in our individual lives.

*The Desire of Ages* describes it this way:

- In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. **The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts** that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. **The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.** The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity



was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer.** It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. **Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature.** Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church (The Desire of Ages 671, emphasis mine).

Jesus came to Earth and became a real human being and as our substitute confronted and overcame Satan and sin and procured the remedy to our terminal sin condition. The Holy Spirit takes that remedy and applies it in the hearts and minds of all who trust Him. We are recreated within with new hearts and new desires and are empowered to live victoriously as we receive the new life from Jesus and brought to us by the Holy Spirit.

Do you see why Satan attacks the Trinity and seeks to destroy the belief in the Holy Spirit?

## WEDNESDAY

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Read first paragraph,

- Paul identifies four groups of “gifted” people as part of the treasure trove of the exalted Jesus that He gives to His church: (1) apostles; (2) prophets; (3) evangelists; (4) shepherds (ESV) and teachers (the structure of the Greek phrase suggests these are a single group). Christ gives these gifts to accomplish important work: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, ESV) and “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, ESV). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 60).

What do you make of these different roles?

Apostles are typically thought of as those who met Jesus and were personally instructed by Jesus. Most Christians don't call themselves Apostles and reserve that term for the 12 and Paul, who was also personally instructed by Jesus.

What about the others—prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers?

Evangelists would be people who primarily take the gospel message to the world, to those who have not yet been converted to Christ, but this doesn't mean they don't teach, but that their primary role would be that of reaching out to convert the unconverted.

Pastors and teachers are people who work to educate, lead, care for, and build up those who have been converted to Christ, to help them grow, mature, and advance in the things of God.



What about the prophets? Who are the prophets?

Does this term refer only to those who have had a vision or those who have written Scripture?

No, there are many prophets described in Scripture who we have no record of them receiving a vision, or writing Scripture, but they were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak a message from God, whether in words or in deeds.

So a better term today would be spokesperson for God—someone who speaks a message from God for the people of that time and place.

Revelation seven gives insight:

- After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the **foreheads of the servants of our God**” (Revelation 7:1-3 NIV84).

Who are these servants of God who are to be sealed before the four winds blow?

- “But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands you gave through **your servants the prophets**. (Ezra 9:10 NIV84, emphasis mine).
- From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you **my servants the prophets**. (Jeremiah 7:25 NIV84, emphasis mine).
- Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to **his servants the prophets**. (Amos 3:7, NIV84, emphasis mine).
- This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Are you not the one I spoke of in former days **by my servants the prophets** of Israel? (Ezekiel 38:17, NIV84, emphasis mine).
- We have not listened to **your servants the prophets**, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. (Daniel 9:6, NIV84, emphasis mine).
- But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded **my servants the prophets**, overtake your forefathers? (Zechariah 1:6, NIV84, emphasis mine).



- But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to **his servants the prophets**. (Revelation 10:7, NIV84, emphasis mine).

The prophets are those who have a message from God—God’s spokespersons. Revelation seven makes some very interesting points about being a prophet, or the gift of prophecy, being gifted by God to speak a message from Him to the people. First point, is that the empowerment by the Holy Spirit to be a spokesperson for God to take a message from God to the people *did not stop after Pentecost*.

According to Revelation seven, there will be a large group of people, symbolically represented by the 144,000 who are prophets, God’s spokespersons at the end of time. This would affirm that God continues to empower people to give His message to others. And my view, is that this end-time message is the message found in Revelation 14, which calls people back to Creator worship, which requires the rejection of imposed law, the Romanization of Christianity, and return to design law view of things.

The next point is that according to Revelation seven, right before Jesus comes there will be a large group of people who have been empowered by God to give that final message of mercy to the world, and they will be settled or sealed into the truth so that no trial, trouble, or tribulation will shake them out of it. And from their witness, a great multitude from every nation, tribe, language, and people will accept the truth and be saved.

Who can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be one of these end-times spokespersons for God?

- Is being empowered the Holy Spirit to speak a message from God something that only happens through the acknowledgement and official actions of denominational churches?
- In other words, is ordination by a church the same thing as being gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit?
- Who speaks with greater authority someone who is gifted by the Holy Spirit with the prophetic gift or someone who is not gifted by the Holy Spirit but is ordained by your church and even holds high office in the organization?
- Why would the one gifted by the Holy Spirit speak with more authority? From where does authority come? What do the gifts of the Holy Spirit do for a person—and in this case specifically a prophet would be gifted to do what? Speak the truth clearly. So what gives the prophet’s message more authority than an ordained minister? **The power and authority of the truth itself!**

We must stop surrendering our thinking to others. We must stop allowing people in positions of office, with credentials, with organizational authority to tell us what to think. We should be humble, respectful, listen and then study for ourselves but always follow where the truth leads.





## THURSDAY

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What does it mean to grow up in Christ?

Consider what the writer of Hebrews wrote:

- We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary** truths of God's word all over again. You need **milk**, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still **an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness**. But solid food is for the **mature**, who by constant use have **trained themselves to distinguish good from evil**. Therefore let us leave the **elementary teachings** about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the **foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death**... (Hebrews 5:11-6:1 NIV84).

What do you understand this to be telling us?

What is elementary school? Elementary school teaches elementary or basic things, the beginning stuff—the a,b,c's that need to be understood before one can read, but this is milk, not solid food.

Is milk important to an infant, necessary even? So, these elementary things are essential to the Christian experience, but they are elementary, infantile. What would we say to those who insist on never learning more than the a,b,c's, if at church each week they insisted we always sing the alphabet song, but we never actually read?

And what specifically does Hebrews 5-6 tell us is the elementary teaching? "repentance from acts that lead to death" which is a focus on the dos and don'ts, the rules, the law. This is childlike thinking, the penal legal way of understanding things, its wrong not to brush one's teeth because mommy has a rule. The child doesn't think about the laws of health, only obeying the rules. The child doesn't want to get in trouble, doesn't want to get punished. But the child also is very intolerant of rule-breaking, and this is why elementary school is filled with tattletales, "Johnny was passing notes teacher."

And the church is filled with such infantile Christians who are rule-keepers and tattletales.

And according to this text, those who remain on the elementary teachings, the rules, are not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. And this has proved true as the imposed law adherents, have replaced righteousness by faith with the penal legal fiction of declaring someone righteous who is not. They are no acquainted at all with the teaching about righteousness.

Read the second paragraph,

- Paul believes divisiveness to be an important mark of error: That which nourishes and grows the body and helps it hold together is good while that which depletes and divides it is evil. By turning from the divisive teaching and to that of tested and trusted teachers (Eph. 4:11), they



will advance toward true Christian maturity and play effective roles in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12, 13; compare Eph. 4:15, 16). (Adult SS Guide 3rd Q 2023, Ephesians p. 61).

There is truth in the idea that error brings division, and in fact Satan is a divider and constantly seeks to cause division, and that when Christ is in the heart there is unity. But how can this idea of divisiveness being used as a mark of error actually be used to advance error and Satan's kingdom?

- Did the Pharisees accuse Jesus of teaching divisive things, ideas that were breaking away from their orthodoxy and introducing division?
- Did the Jews accuse the Apostles of being divisive?
- Did the church of the Dark Ages accuse the Reformers of being divisive?
- And the legalist SDA leaders at 1888 GC accused Jones and Waggoner of being divisive

So, what is the balance here—how is it that lies and error bring division, and division can be a sign of error, but when the truth comes division seems to occur? In fact aren't we instructed to call God's people out of Babylon and wouldn't that cause division—separating people from that old system?