



**Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church**  
Sanford, North Carolina

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**God's Purpose and Provision for His Church**  
**Ephesians 4:1-16**

This week marks the completion of our fourth year of ministry together as pastor and people. A lot has happened over the past four years, some of it good, some of it not so good. Many families in our church have faced crises of one kind or another, including mine.

For us, 2007 in particular was a year filled with both joy and sorrow, exhilaration and exhaustion. Jo Ann's and my trip to Britain and Jeffrey and Jonathan's mission trip to the Ukraine with our youth were wonderful experiences. But they were followed by the deaths of Jo Ann's mother, my brother, and Jo Ann's father within the space of five months. You all rallied around us and supported us in a marvelous way during those difficult days, and we continue to be grateful.

Many of you have had your own family crises as well. Sickness, death, disabilities, divorces, layoffs and financial setbacks—folks in our church have been through a lot.

And we've been through a lot as a church. We lost some of our staff, and some families who had been a part of our fellowship have chosen to go elsewhere. There's been a lot of difficulty and disappointment. But God has still been good to us. He's blessed us with new staff members, though finding some of them wasn't easy. And the Lord has added a number of individuals and families to our number as well.

We are very much a church in transition. And I'm very interested to see what kind of church we will become. As I said last Sunday, I believe that God *wants* to do some wonderful and significant things through us. But what he *will* do depends a great degree on how we respond to what he's already doing.

Well, days like today are a good time to stop and take stock—to look back and assess where we've come from and where we are, and to look forward to where God is leading us.

And in our relationship as pastor and people, it's also a good time to take stock of *our expectations*.

On Sunday, June 26, 2005, my family and I worshiped with you and I preached in that service prior to your voting to call me to serve as your senior pastor. That morning I talked about how it was a time of expectations, and how it was important for us all to be clear about those expectations.

I went on to point out that morning that since as Baptists we profess to take the Bible as our final authority on all matters of faith and practice, and we believe in the priesthood of all believers, so that each member of the Lord's church has a role to fulfill in the work of God's kingdom, we should consider what the Scriptures say about the roles of both the ministers of the church and the members of the church. We then looked together at Ephesians 4:1-16, the same text we're looking at today. It tells us about God's purpose and provision for his church.

This morning, I want to revisit this passage and that sermon. As we look back and look ahead as we begin our fifth year together, let's clarify some expectations from a biblical perspective—not based on my or your personal preferences, but on what Scripture says about the role of the members and the ministers.

### ***The church as the body***

In this passage, Paul used the human body as an image to show what God intends for his church to be and do.

Now this wasn't an unusual image in the ancient world, especially when people were talking about some kind of group. While the ancients didn't know much about the intricacies of the human body compared to today's medical science, they were well aware that it was an amazing creation. So they often used it as an image to describe how a group in politics or a society should cooperate for the common good. We use it the same way today when we talk about the body politic, the body in parliamentary procedure, and so forth.

When we read Paul's letters, we see that this actually seems to be his *favorite* image of the church. He used it in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, and again here in Ephesians. But just what is Paul trying to say when he describes the church as the body of Christ?

### ***God's purpose for his church***

This text from Ephesians is a crucial passage. It serves as a transition from the body of the letter (chapters 2-3, where Paul lays out his understanding of God's grace in Christ and how God has made both Jews and Gentiles who trust Christ into one new humanity—something only God could do!) to the parenetic section (where he talks about the ethical implications of the theological realities he's described). This text is the first of five "walk" (*peripateîn*) sayings in this section of the letter that describe for the Ephesians (and us) how those redeemed by God's grace and brought together as one body are to live as his people. As a transitional passage, this first ethical section brims with theology, and it's a tremendous statement about the Lord's church and its relationship to him.

Paul bolsters his appeal to walk worthy of their calling by stressing the *oneness* of the Christian faith. He emphasizes seven "ones": one body (the church), one Spirit (the Holy Spirit), just as believers are called to one hope (resurrection and eternity with Christ as God's kingdom triumphs), one Lord (Jesus), one faith (trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior), and one baptism (the common outward mark of believers in the New Testament). Finally, there is one God and Father of all who is over all, through all, and in all. In other words, everything about the Christian faith has the character of *unity* or *oneness* about it; in fact, God's ultimate eternal purpose is to bring everything *under one Head*, Jesus Christ (1:10)!

So to begin with, Paul wants them to experience the *unity* of the church. The body is *one* in Christ. For Paul, unity isn't something we create. It's something Christ has given his church, which we recognize and live out and protect by, as someone has aptly put it, practicing it fearlessly. It's what Jesus prayed for the night before his crucifixion and death.

In Ephesians 2, Paul stressed that through Christ's death and resurrection, God has created out of a broken, divided humanity one new humanity, in which both Jewish and Gentile believers are now members of God's family. Here, he goes even farther, to focus on living out that unity in relationships within the church. With such an intense focus on oneness, is it any wonder that Paul appeals to the Ephesians "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" —the peace Christ brought us through his death and resurrection?





her, and reached out his hand to Jamie's. Then with one hand apiece, they worked together, enabling Jamie to make the church, the steeple, and all the people.<sup>2</sup>

“He gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up . . .”<sup>3</sup> Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures are taken from the *New International Version*.

<sup>2</sup> Billy Waters, *Teacher Touch* (Colorado Springs: Cook, 1999). Cited on [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

<sup>3</sup> My translation.