



One body in Christ

This tutorial continues to discuss the area of Identity, and looks at the third question in that area: 'Are they growing in their understanding of the bonds that unite them to the global/local Body under Christ as its Head?'

Ephesians 4:4-6: For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, in all, and living through all.

This verse reflects the reality of who we are in Christ and it's quite a stark contrast to the realities of what we're seeing in places where they have no light and are in darkness. It can be hard to understand darkness until you see people groups who have been separated from civilization. People often imagine these people to be some sort of utopian society where they're actually loving one another and they're helping each other out and working together in their gardens in the sunshine every day.

But we see in the case studies that it's not that way at all. These unreached people groups who are cut off from the Gospel and the light that it brings can actually be quite hateful towards one another and often lie and deceive one another to get their own way. In one particular story, we heard that the lack of trust between people caused them to live several hours apart from each other, even though they were in the same clan. But that's the heart of the enemy, he wants to divide, but as you see in the verses above, as believers we're actually united under Christ.

Last time

We looked at the second question from the WILD outline in the area of Identity. We talked about how people can see themselves as part of God's great Narrative, stretching back to Pentecost and forward to Christ's return. In this tutorial we will discuss the third question in the WILD outline in the area of Identity.

Are they growing in their understanding of the bonds that unite them to the global/local Body under Christ as its Head?

Dave describes how a common identity in Christ has broken down past tribal enmity:

It's been exciting to see these previous identities break down to where they understand right and wrong as the Bible establishes it, to where they would stand on the side of right, rather than just standing on the side of their brother or close relative. Also, these suspicions and fears that they had of language groups, they found a oneness, a comradery, with many people in these other language groups because of Christ, because of their identity in Christ.

And at one time there in our home village, we actually had a conference of believers, and there were people attending that conference from ten different language groups, and that would have been unheard of in the past. And so many of the people, with whom they now enjoy Christian fellowship, are the children and grandchildren of the arch enemies of their parents and grandparents.

John describes how the church planting team used practical means to connect the believers to the wider body from the earliest days:

We told them, actually, that it was their brothers and sisters back in Australia and America and New Zealand who had sent us to them, and all these other churches had played a part in them hearing the Gospel. And now they were part of this big fellowship of believers around the world because God's message had not only come to them there and to us in Australia and New Zealand and America, but it was also in other parts of Indonesia.

And we told them about some of the people that had helped us build their houses, that these were guys who also had trusted in Christ. And so, on occasions if we went out to town, we would take them with us and we would meet up with other Christians and take them to church. Now, they couldn't understand church in Indonesian, but they knew that these people loved Jesus and that was important and they knew that there was a bond there, regardless of the fact that they had difficulty communicating.

We asked Bill and Kelley how the churches from the remote community in which they lived has integrated with others, including the majority culture church:

I think one of the things that we did through the teaching, especially through Ephesians, was try to show them that we're all one in Christ.

I think that although they looked at us as being a different skin colour of course and a different nationality, they realised very quickly that we were one with them in Christ. It's been a little harder though with those in country as they look to the national church. For one, where we are located the national church isn't defined very well.

So they even have a little bit of trouble knowing what that is. Recently we've actually been living in one of the cities there close to where our tribal work is, and we've been able to kind of, not join a national church, but we basically go there every Sunday and sit there and just develop relationships. One of the things that we're trying to do is help that national church understand who this tribal group is.

Then when these guys come out we bring them and let them meet there too. So again, it's probably one of those things, it's a work in progress. We're seeing a lot of challenges, especially because the poverty levels and education levels are just huge. But we're just trying to help position them to where they're having to deal with who the church is and sort of ask those questions, and Lord willing, we'll see some growth in that area later.

In our context it's quite remote, so it's a six-hour canoe ride and then six hours by road, and so they're not really in contact with the national church in town very often. But they do know of other churches that have been planted in other areas nearby. We've been able to get them together and help them cross paths and do some conferences and get their relationships going and let them exchange numbers and things like that to try and put them in contact more and more with each other.

And it was real interesting, at the last conference that we did, on the last day we walked down through the village and there were tonnes of bags, these rice bags all piled up and we were like, "What are those? What are you guys doing?" And they had actually taken a collection. They had heard about one of the tribes that was there. They're much poorer. It's harder to get to. They're straight up on top of the mountain. They don't have coconuts, God forbid. And so, they were just really feeling sorry for these people who really didn't have a lot of material items.

And so they had gone through the village and they had collected pots and pans and a guitar and knives and clothes and they had all these bags, six huge rice bags full ready to go back with them. And so, I feel like they do, as they have contact, they do feel that identity,

and as they meet they realise that there's other people out there that are part of this.

Are they allowing God's Word to define the proper basis of their relationships as a group, or do they seem to be unknowingly applying the values of the wider culture in the church context?

Phil describes how believers from a minority people group are learning to relate to brothers and sisters from other parts of Mozambique:

We've had quite a few local pastors and local believers coming down to visit the believers here. They're always asking us, "Are these guys believers? How do we relate to these guys? Is this just somebody coming in for a visit or is this somebody that's actually one of our brothers or one of our sisters? How do we relate to these guys?" And so, it's been really good for these believers from outside coming to visit and for our believers to connect with them and to understand, "Okay, these guys are part of our family, and even though they belong to this, that or the other group, what unites us isn't that we're also a part of that group, except to say we're part of the group that follows Isa, and that's our primary identity."

So, we don't care what denomination per se they're from or what religion, what is of interest to us is that they're following God. They trust Him. They know that He has to do everything to save them. It's not something they do themselves. There are other minority groups in which we're doing similar sorts of work nearby, and they're able to go over there and visit with those guys. If they have a conference then they'll invite believers from here. Now, we're careful which believers we'll send over there.

I mean, it's totally a Christian area and when they go over there, the thing that they're going to do is they're going to slaughter pigs and that's going to be their main food the whole time. When we're sending people over there we know this is going to be a shock to their identity, even though they're growing and understanding and they're hearing from God's Word that it doesn't really matter. For someone who's still not used to that, to go into that environment and to be totally surrounded by Christianese and by pork and by all these sorts of things, for the guys here it's a steamrolling.

We're careful who we send over there. We're trying to send people that we think can handle that, who aren't going to be like blown away and of weak faith and fall apart because they were eating pork at this meeting. And so, we try and be careful about that. And it's been good for them identity-wise to go, "Hey, we share the same belief, but these guys come from a totally different angle to us." So

that's been a good experience for those people who have gone and come back.

And what's important for them is this growing sense of identity because here they're a minority. Here they're freaks. Nobody knows what to do with them here. But one of the growing senses of identity is this connection outside. And so as they say, "You know what, there's a lot of other people that believe like we do, and when we see other people and we have this connection with other people and we hear what they're saying, we realise it's the same thing that we're hearing and that they're reading God's Word and we're reading God's Word and it's saying the same thing to us."

Then it's hugely relieving for them to have the sense of connection and it's encouraging to have the sense of connection. They are always wanting to send greetings to believers in other places and they're very excited to hear greetings from believers in other places.

Is there a sense that anything or anyone's authority to shape who they are as a church is legitimate if, and only if, it actively recognizes Christ as the true head of the Body? Whatever other factors might also draw them together, is it ultimately their shared faith, hope and identity in Christ that they see tying them together and defining them as a local church body?

Gebi describes how a common experience of God's grace has healed long-standing fractures in the community:

In the past there were many, many divisions in our communities, and we now know that God's judgement was hanging over us then. But we were amazed to think that after hearing God's Word we became His children, as He brought us together then as one people. So as I said previously, we were a fractured community, as individuals, as villages, as families, as clans, but now we are one because of what God has done for us. So, that view of being divided has been replaced by a view of us as one in Christ.

We see in John 17:21-23 the heart of Christ as He's praying for us who would come to know Him. And He's praying that we may all be one, "Just as you Father are in me, and I in you, they also may be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent me." He says it again, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, you in me, that they may be perfectly one. So that the world may know that You have sent me and love them even as You love me."

The testimonies in this tutorial are powerful. We saw that the testimony of Christ Himself is at stake, depending on whether or not local groups of believers would choose to see themselves as one in Christ and fight for that

and prioritize that. And when that's done, then the name of Christ is clearly seen and God is honoring them and He's honoring His Son through them.

The testimonies are a powerful witness of Christ and His life and the unity with the Father. Within the body and within the church fracturing does exist. There is no utopia out there where people are just living in harmony. Division is something that is present in every culture, we know that. But when within the church—not to say it's ever perfect—but when those fracture lines that are always there in any society are overcome and believers do find that unity in Him, it shows the impact of God's Word.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Describe some of the challenges that might exist for a new church in a minority group as it learns to relate to the broader national church.
2. In church planting terms, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of a community having a strong corporate or collectivist culture (as opposed to a more individualistic culture)?
3. When someone comes into a community to teach God's Word, they are often given a specific religious identity and even labelled that way. Is that something you have thought about for yourself? Do you think you would avoid that kind of identity or embrace it? Why?