

In a nutshell...



## Sermon in a Nutshell!

In Ephesians chapter 4, St Paul writes about **unity in the church**. By church he means both the local church at Ephesus, and the Church world-wide. He implores them to live by God's standards, being humble, gentle, patient and tolerant with one another. ("Easier said than done!" we would reply). There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, etc, so there can be only one church, "the Body of Christ" as he calls it.

St Paul then writes about the varied gifts Christ has given, calling some to be prophets, some pastors, some evangelists, some teachers, (and many other roles too, we might add), but the purpose is "to build up the Body of Christ into a unity of faith".

Over the following centuries, St Paul's advice has not always been followed, and factions and divisions have arisen in individual churches, and between groups of churches. People have been arrogant not humble, harsh not gentle, impatient and intolerant. Sometimes they would say for good reason, and sometimes for lesser motives.

Pecking orders between those gifted or called by Christ tend to mask God's equal and gracious love for all. Denominations have sometimes refused to speak to each other. "My" understanding of God is right, and yours is dodgy (or downright evil) if you don't agree completely with me.

Thankfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there are powerful efforts to work together, to heal the injured Body of Christ. In Reading the "Regenerate" initiative ([www.regeneratereading.org.uk](http://www.regeneratereading.org.uk)) is bringing together churches and individuals of every denomination, to reach out to the public who have not yet discovered the love of God in Christ Jesus. On January 21<sup>st</sup> there will be the commissioning service for a huge variety of outreach projects by dozens of local churches. We have surprised ourselves that past differences have been put aside, and genuine love and acceptance are growing. The Body of Christ in Reading is an example for the churches of UK to look to.

The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins this week, and the prayers of the past years are being answered right here on our doorstep. It wouldn't be surprising if we felt proud of ourselves, but our pride must be in Christ who has called us, and we are humbled that God's Spirit is working even in us.

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