

The Shape of the Body, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 10090809
Ephesians 4:25-5:2 and John 6:35, 41-51
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 9 August, 2009

Today is “Football Sunday,” a tradition here at Elon Community Church. It’s a day when this congregation says, “We support you! We are behind you, we hope you win, and we hope you don’t get hurt!” Many of the people sitting in this sanctuary will be there cheering for you when you’re at Rhodes and on the road too. For some of you this is only your second day on campus. Welcome to you, and we hope you enjoy your Elon experience. It’s a great place and it’s full of great people.

We want you all to understand that this is a sanctuary. It’s a place of refuge. The members of this church do not give you grades or make you practice! It’s a place of peace and quiet and where you have friends. As a team, you have a tough road ahead of you, not because you’re at the bottom of the Southern Conference, the way the Phoenix were three years ago, but because you’re a contender for the top spot in the league. You finished third last year and you’re currently rated second by the media. Your climb from last to second was a lot easier than will be the climb from second to first. In order to make that huge effort, check the shape of your body.

What is the shape of your body? Are you in shape? If you’re a football player, you had better be in shape, or you could get hurt. Your coaches will make you get into shape! You’ve got to exercise. You have to watch what you eat. You can’t abuse your body. Each and every one of you will have to be in your best shape. The one who isn’t can pull the whole team down. There’s nothing worse for a team than when a key player pulls a muscle because he hasn’t stretched enough or because he’s not properly hydrated. Keep your physical body in shape. That goes for you church members too!

There is another kind of a body than just your individual physical body. You form a body together as a team – and as a congregation. That body has to be in shape also. The Phoenix football team set its own theme for this year. The theme follows the word FOCUS: Finish, Opportunity, Consistency, Unity, and Swagger! I’m going to focus on that fourth word, Unity, in this sermon.

To be a team or to be a church congregation, we need unity– not uniformity, but unity. We need to be one in purpose. When we have unity, we form a body.

The author of Ephesians had some good advice about shaping that body. He said in this passage that “you are members of one another.”¹ You can’t be a loner. Each of you has a different function, but you work together and form a unity, a whole, a body.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote that, “If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”² “And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?”³ If everyone were a quarterback, who’d be the receiver? If everyone were a choir director, who would do the singing? Or, if everyone were an usher, who would be seated? We all have different functions, and when we do our function well, the body works well.

We are members of one another. Because we are members of one another, we’re going to

¹Ephesians 4:25

²1 Corinthians 12:15

³1 Corinthians 12:16-17

Speak the truth to each other. “Hey, I don’t think you’re performing at your highest level.”

“No, man, I’m not. I’m having a bad day.”

“Oh? Tell me about it. What’s going on?” And then tell the other what’s going on.

If the truth is you’re not performing well because you just don’t care, then be honest. Be honest with yourself and be honest with each other. And, if you just don’t care, that’s a lie. Something is going on. Speak the truth, and speak the truth to yourself first. If it’s a problem with a girlfriend, tell it. If it’s a problem with a chemistry grade, tell it. Speak the truth.

Because we are members of one another and we speak the truth to each other, we might get angry at each other, but we are not going to sin. It’s okay to be angry, but it’s not okay to take our anger out on someone else. That’s sin. Anything that separates you from someone else or from God, is sin.

The writer wasn’t giving a command here in verse twenty-six, “Be angry!” No, he was recognizing that anger is a pretty common basic emotion. “Be angry but do not sin.”⁴ If your anger causes you to strike out at a teammate, it breaks down the body. It tears the team apart.

Because we are members of one another, we will not let evil talk come out of our mouths.⁵ Evil talk could be putting another person down. Don’t let it happen. Evil talk could be lying. When you lie, you have to cover up the lie, and it gets worse. Don’t let it happen.

I read an interesting interview in this week’s *New York Times*. The writer interviewed a magician who said he wasn’t lying. He said, “I want you to see me putting this card in the middle of the deck,” as he put the card on the bottom of the deck. He wasn’t lying, but he was deceiving! Don’t deceive. Don’t let evil talk come out of your mouth.

Let the only talk that comes out of your mouth be talk that builds up. When someone does well, compliment that person. When you build up the individual, you build up the team. That goes in the church, too. Build each other up.

Because we are members of one another, we will forgive each other. We’re going to make mistakes. There is no greater gift that I can receive from someone else than to be forgiven. It makes me know that I can change. I can improve. I can do things better and I’m not condemned to continue to make the same mistakes.

Because we are members of one another, we will trust each other. We speak the truth, we build each other up, we forgive. All of these qualities help us trust each other. Trust is a gift. I trust that you are going to do your job. I trust that you are going to be consistent, and that you’re giving your all.

The body, or community, is shaped as God’s people open up to each other and to God. We open ourselves up to God’s transforming power. The author says, “... be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”⁶ The Greek word for “kind” is similar in pronunciation to “Christ.” The word in Greek is *chrestos*. Christ in Greek is pronounced *Christos*. The writer offers a play on words for us. Be kind to each other: *chrestos*. Be Christ to each other. Kindness is the foundation of our behavior toward one another.

Have a good year. Get your body in shape.

⁴Ephesians 4:26

⁵Ephesians 4:29

⁶Ephesians 4:32