

BODY OF PROOF: WEEK FIVE
GOD'S NEW SOCIETY

One of the most important truths about being Christ's Body that Paul talks about is in Ephesians 2.14-16: "***For Christ is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.***"

The phrase 'One New Man' means more than being just a community of believers. It means being a society.¹ The One New Man is The Body of Jesus Christ, and His Body is the Church. That means that **The Church is God's New Society.**²

A **society** is a more wide-ranging and foundational word than **community**. Most of us think of our local church as a community, and this is right. But we are more than just a community.

Healthy community is the core of being a society, but a society is more than a community. We often talk about being a community, experiencing community and doing life together in our local church. And usually what we mean is establishing a group of likeminded friends, feeling that we belong or fit with certain others, and then doing things together, being available to each other, helping one another and so on. A community is about relationships and belonging.

A society is about the beliefs, the systems, and the way we function together that preserves community over the long run. Being One New Man is about being a society together. To be sure, community is the basic building block of a society, **but it is functioning together as a society that causes community to flourish.**

A community focuses on relating together. A society focuses on functioning together.

One sociologist describes the difference between community and society as a society having a much wider scope as compared with a community.³ A **community** has common feelings about things and does not have wide diversity. A **society** has a wide diversity and because of its wide scope, a society can embrace people having differences and even conflicts.

When God made Israel a nation, He didn't make just a community of Abraham's descendants; He made them a society with laws and structures and systems. Likewise, God means for us as a local church to model His new society. We as a church are the blueprint that society can look at and say, "Oh, that's the way God intended the planet to run."

Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are some of the New Testament "systems" we see in scripture that point to how the church is to function as a society?• Where could things go wrong for a local church that only focuses on community and not society?• How does society allow for greater diversity to exist in the church?
------------------	--

Scripture gives us insight into the earliest churches that can help us to picture the difference between community and society.

Acts 2.42 gives us a wonderful description of a community: "***And they [the infant Church] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.***" The brothers and sisters are simply being with each other, praying for each other, worshiping together, digesting the word together. This is a great picture of community.

Romans 12.4-8 gives us a different picture, a picture of being a society: ***“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”*** Here the emphasis is on how we use our gifts together to build up the community. For the earliest churches, this meant that there were ways that they coordinated their gifts together to “build up the body of Christ.”

Another interesting glimpse of how the ideas of community and society work together is to once again go back to the earliest church in Jerusalem. We read in Acts 2 of the wonderful community that they shared. But by Acts 6, they start experiencing growing pains with conflicts and divisions that needed to be solved. What the apostles did under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was to set in place an additional leadership structure, that we would call deacons [See Acts 6.1-7]. Needing to solve a problem in the community led to establishing a new structure that drew on different gifts and allowed them to tend to the community even better. What was happening in Acts 6 is that they had to function as a society, by finding systems and structures of working together that preserved the richness of their spiritual community.

Final Take-Home Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it look like for individual members of the body to contribute to the function, the society aspect of the church? • If part of the function of the body is for everyone to use their gifts to serve one another, what does that look like in a local church? What would need to change? • Do you know what your Romans 12 gifts are? How can you use those gifts (society) to help maintain healthy community?
Prayer Tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask God to show you any area where you have viewed incorrectly the body of Christ, or your participation in the body of Christ. Repent and receive the truth!
Share With The Lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an unbeliever shares about community hurt from a Christian, you can share more of God’s design for a thriving society and that could sustain unity in community. Offer to pray for their wounded heart and invite them to experience something new in your church.

Romans 12 reference guide:

Gift	Definition	What It Does
Perceiver	Discerns and declares the will of God	Keeps us centered on spiritual principles
Server	Renders practical service	Keeps the work of ministry moving
Teacher	Researches and teaches the Bible	Keeps us studying and learning
Exhorter	Encourages personal progress	Keeps us applying spiritual truth
Giver	Imparts, shares	Keeps us replicating
Administrator	Gives leadership and direction	Keeps us organized and increases our vision
Compassion	Provides personal and emotional support	Keeps us in right attitudes and relationships

Footnotes

¹ John Stott, an Anglican priest in England, and who (along with leaders like Billy Graham) is considered one of the top five voices the last half of the 20th century said this about this passage in his commentary: the One New Man is God's New Society.

² That phrase "*Christ created in himself one new man... reconciling both to God in one body through the cross*" is critical to grasp. The reason Paul is addressing this is because of the tension between Jesus followers who were Jewish and the new group of Jesus followers who were gentile. Paul is telling them that the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been completely torn down through the work of Messiah Jesus. That is the context, and that requires a separate focus, which we need to delve into soon.

³ Wikipedia spells out the difference this way: *The scope of community is narrow compared to that of society. In a community every effort is made to avoid differences or conflicts and to bring likeness as nearly as possible because cooperation and conflicts cannot exist in a community. In a society likeness and conflict can exist side by side and because it is diverse there is greater possibility of making adjustments in order to preserve a given society. A society is shaped by a sense of 'oneness.'*