

September 8, 2019

“Unity in the Body of Christ”
Ephesians 4:1-16

FCF: Our struggle with unity and diversity

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The church has a great calling.
(magnet) We must walk in a manner worthy of it.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“E pluribus unum” - meaning “out of many, one” - is a traditional motto for the United States. It comes from the original thirteen colonies emerging as a new single nation. It’s since also come to point to our melting pot culture, meaning “out of many peoples, one people.” It’s a fine ideal. But we hardly meet it amidst our corrosive culture wars. The meanings of diversity, inclusion, and democracy are up for grabs. The motto has become “out of many, even more.”

What’s the answer? The gospel of Jesus. Put another way, the church showing the way.

SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 4:1-16**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

There’s an interesting connection between identity and memory ([READ quote](#)):

BBC Radio 3, the U.K.'s primary classical music station, ran a fascinating series of articles on music and memory. Adam Zeman, a Professor of Cognitive and Behavioral Neurology, wrote about amnesia and memory loss and their relationship to epilepsy. Zeman mentioned two patients, Peter and Marcus, who described their amnesia in very similar terms. One said: "My memory of my past is a blank space. I feel lost and hopeless. I'm trying to explore a void." Both described how disconcerting it is to look at photos. Even though they recognize themselves, they have no recollection of the moment. One said that it's like "reading a biography of a stranger." He's conscious of recent memories slipping away from him, like ships sailing out to sea in the fog, never to be seen again.

Two things stand out in Zeman's essay. First, without memory, it's hard to cling to an identity. So one of the patients said: "I don't have the moorings that other people draw on to know who they are." Second, it's hard to have hope when we don't know our past. As Zeman explained, "The inability to invoke the past greatly impedes their ability to imagine a future."

That’s hard and frightening to imagine - no moorings of who and and where you were and are.

The Apostle Paul shows us the church need never have this struggle. ([READ Ephesians 4:1](#)) Let’s break this down. Paul has been imprisoned in Rome for the sake of the gospel. That lends some gravity to this. This is the halfway point of the letter. So he shifts from exposition to explanation, from indicative to imperative, from what God has done to our response. He speaks of our calling, harkening back to the earlier chapters, all the blessings of God’s sovereign grace. And he says we are to live in a way “worthy” of that calling. That is, in a way that is fitting to it, literally, “bringing up the other beam of the scales.” It’s quite a statement. Paul wants us to know the church has a great calling. A great calling. We must walk in a manner worthy of it.

What would that look like? Paul tells us three things. First, it means demonstrating the unity. Second, it means honoring the diversity. And, third, it means striving towards maturity.

I. DEMONSTRATING THE UNITY

First, we must be demonstrating the unity. This is seen in vv.1-6. There’s a lot here.

A) What We Are to Do

Let’s start with just a simple statement of what we we are to do ([READ Ephesians 4:3](#)).

1. Not create it

We do not create this unity. This is something the Holy Spirit has done in making us one.

2. But maintain it

So we do not create this unity but we are to maintain it. We are to watch over it, to guard it. And we are to make every effort towards this, to labor and struggle. We are to fight to live at peace.

B) How We Are to Do It

But how are we to do this? What would that look like? (READ Ephesians 4:2)

1. Foundation stones

These are the foundation stones. And without them, we have no hope of any real lasting unity.

2. Character qualities

And notice these are not just structural strategies. They are character qualities. In fact, they are the very same character qualities we see in Jesus and that flow from a relationship with Jesus.

C) Why We Are to Do It

So that's the what and the how. But why are we to do this? (READ Ephesians 4:4-6)

1. Trinitarian realities

We are to live as one because of these trinitarian realities. The Spirit creates the body. The Lord Jesus creates the one faith, one hope, and one baptism. And the Father creates the one family.

2. The nature of the church

Which tells us something about the nature of the church. As John Stott put it (READ quote), "The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead." Think about that for a moment.

This is why we see this call towards demonstrating the unity of the church.

Illustration:

But what do we make of all the conflict within the church? Those are visible appearances that contradict this invisible reality. Think of it this way. Imagine a family. Mr. and Mrs. Jones have divorced. Their sons, Tom, Dick, and Harry have squabbled and moved - one to Canada, one to Australia, and one to Germany. They've lost contact with each other and no longer speak.

Let's say we are the cousins of the Jones boys. How should we react? We would long to see reconciliation and would say, "This is wrong. You are a family. You need to act like it."

Application:

We would seek to be peacemakers, laboring towards the visible appearances lining up with the invisible realities. Now what would it mean for us to carry that image into the church?

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II. HONORING THE DIVERSITY

Demonstrating the unity. But then, secondly, honoring the diversity. (READ Ephesians 4:7-12) There is a dramatic shift that takes place here. For this unity does not mean uniformity.

A) The Giver of the Gifts

Let's start with the giver of the gifts, as seen in vv.7-10. This is about the work of Jesus.

1. Christ's ascension

Paul quotes from Psalm 68, the imagery pointing to how, in the ancient world, kings shared the spoils of war with the people. The psalmist says, "This is what the God of Israel has done." Paul sees this fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit.

2. Our assurance

And the ascension of Jesus is our assurance. That is, this same Jesus, risen and victorious, has given gifts to us. Not meaning saving gifts but serving gifts. And not just to a few but to all.

B) The Gifts Themselves

What of the gifts themselves? Paul shifts the focus from abilities to particular leaders.

1. Variation of the lists

We see that in v.11. And what's interesting is the variation of the lists. Each of the "gift lists" in the New Testament is different. None of them is complete or exhaustive. They're all different.

2. Common theme of this one

But here we see a common theme - the importance of God's Word and the danger of heresy.

C) Their Purpose

Which takes us then to the purpose of the gifts. This is vital (**READ Ephesians 4:11-12**).

1. Immediate

Their immediate purpose is to equip. They are not to do the work of ministry but are to equip the saints so that they can use their gifts in the work of ministry. Not to monopolize but to mobilize.

2. Ultimate

That's the immediate purpose. What of the ultimate purpose, the far horizon? That we would be built up. It's body building, not of our fine physiques but of the church, the body of Christ.

That's what it means to for us honor the diversity of the gifts.

Application:

So much of which cuts against the grain of our defaults. There are some poor models out there. The pyramid - the pastor at the top with all the underlings below. Or the bus - the pastor in the driver's seat with everyone else along for the ride. Those are really poor models.

Then there are the poor mentalities. That is, when we fixate on our gifts being all about us. The first question should not be "What is fulfilling to me?" but "What builds up the body?"

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III. STRIVING TOWARDS MATURITY

Which then takes us to the third point, our striving towards maturity. What does Paul mean by the body of Christ being built up? (**READ Ephesians 4:13-16**) Let me say a few things.

A) How It's Described

How is it described? The language and imagery Paul uses here is really something.

1. Unity and knowledge

Unity and knowledge - it's not doctrine in itself that divides. But divisive people always do.

2. Mature manhood

Mature manhood - this is not just individual maturity but corporate congregational health.

3. The measure of Christ

The measure of Christ - all the fullness that Jesus possesses and gives. It's so hard to grasp this.

B) How It Functions

This is the sort of flourishing that we see. How does it function? What does it yield?

1. Preventing

For starters, there is a prevention and protection. Paul uses these common images of immature children and storm-tossed ships. Immaturity leads to instability and a susceptibility to all kinds of error. This growth, this building up of the body, prevents and protects us against that.

2. Encouraging

And it encourages something really beautiful - the fusion of truth and love, literally, "truthing in love." Which is how truth and love are to be done. Never one without the other. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love. Love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The body-building encourages this. And, like a cycle of sorts, the body is built up as this takes place.

This is what Paul has in mind when he speaks about our striving towards maturity.

Application:

([READ Ephesians 4:15-16](#)) Oh, that we could catch a vision of this. The body's growth comes from Christ. But only as each part does its work. There is an absolute necessity of our looking to Him, depending upon Jesus daily and in all things. But also of each member using the gifts that Jesus has given. Which means that your part in this is just as essential as His.

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CONCLUSION:

Let me say more about the Gift Assessment Test. It's easily accessible through the CPC website and Facebook page. What can you expect as you take it? It's comprehensive, gathering input from four directions. First, you assess your character traits. Second, there is the input from others who know you. Third, you reflect on your experiences. Fourth, your personal convictions - your desires, dreams, and burdens. So it takes a look at this from these four different angles. For there is such complexity to truly understanding our gifts that it takes some working through.

Honestly, I had a hard time sitting down and doing it. Something in me chafed at this. But I finally took time one Sunday afternoon. I'm glad I did. It might prove to be a revelation to you. "I never thought of myself that way before." Or it might be a confirmation to you. "That's what I figured." But either way, whether it's a revelation or a confirmation, this can be truly helpful as we strive to honor the Lord and serve more effectively together in His kingdom.

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