

The Unity of the Body – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul urges a unity of maturity in the life of believers in all humility and patience
2. aim – to cause us to desire a deep unity in the church based on a humble doctrinal maturity
3. passage – Ephesians 4:1-16

b. outline

1. The Unity in the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3)
2. The Unity in the Body (Ephesians 4:4-6)
3. The Unity in the Gifts (Ephesians 4:7-10)
4. The Unity in the Faith (Ephesians 4:11-16)

c. opening

1. the **centrality** of unity for the church

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:20-21)

 - a. in this prayer, Jesus prays for “*those who will believe*” = all believers down through time
 1. note that this is the one *specific* place where Jesus **prays for you and I** as his followers
 - b. in this prayer, Jesus prays that “*they may all be one*” = having a unity amongst them
 1. he does not pray for great evangelistic success (he knows those for whom he is dying)
 2. he does not pray for the safety of believers (he knows the price that will need to be paid)
 3. he *does* pray that believers down through time would be *united*
 - c. in this prayer, Jesus prays this “*so that the world may believe*” = to accomplish his divine goal
 1. unity amongst the elect = *the* thing he asked from his Father for them before his death
2. the **importance** of unity for the church
 - a. Paul was (probably) the greatest commentator on the teachings of Jesus
 1. he quoted him directly a few times, but there are a number of obvious allusions to the words of Jesus scattered throughout his epistles (particularly) – I am convinced that’s what **4:1-6** is
 - b. Paul gives to the Ephesians his first great **imperative**: walk worthy of your calling
 1. our calling being two (2) things: a) the initial *effectual* call by which the Spirit of God calls out of our spiritual tomb to faith in Christ, and b) the continuing call by which the Spirit of God works in us to guide us to holiness in Christ *and* to every kind of service for his kingdom (**vocation**)
 2. thus, the imperative is to “*walk*” (i.e. to live) in a way that is *consistent* with that calling
 - a. to live as a people of enduring faith in Christ and to be useful servants in his kingdom
 - b. but, Paul has a *specific* manner of living in mind here:
 - c. Paul (obviously) considered church unity to be a central matter of concern to him
 1. he sees disparity between Jews and Gentiles; it’s an undercurrent of the letter (so far)
 2. he uses the words “*unity*” and “*one*” here at the core of his point (**see last week**)
 3. he knows that disunity “puts the brakes on” the church advancing the cause of Christ
 - a. **i.e.** churches focused on their own internal strife have little time for prayer or evangelism
 - d. so, Paul gives the church (now) a **definition** of what he means by “*walk in a manner worthy*”:
 1. first, the **characteristics** of the worthy Christian life (**vv. 2-3**)
 - a. **IOW**: the definition of walking in the “*unity of the Spirit*”
 2. second, the **motivation** of the worthy Christian life (**vv. 4-6**)
 - a. **IOW**: those things that should *drive* us to walk in the “*unity of the Spirit*”

I. The Unity in the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3)

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d. the characteristics of a worthy walk (vv. 2-3)

1. (**clarification**) who is the *audience* of these verses, and to what *relationships* do these apply?
 - a. **audience**: followers of Christ in Ephesus, those who can understand the indicatives of chaps. 1-3
 1. none of this letter will make sense to those who are still spiritually dead

- b. *relationships*: how followers of Christ relate to other followers of Christ in the church
 - 1. this is not (in general) a recommendation for how sheep and goats are to get along
 - a. true, these characteristics are valuable as we relate to the lost in our vocations
 - b. but, Paul is *clearly* concerned here with how fellow believers relate to one another
 - 2. this is a significant aspect of the N.T. Pauline corpus: **advising churches how to maintain unity to prevent damage to the gospel message (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5-6)**
 - 3. **principle: how we treat one another in the church directly correlates to the power of our message to the world – we cannot preach reconciliation with God when we have strife with one another, even in the smallest sense**
- 2. “humility” (“gentleness”) = lack of pride; modesty; lit. loneliness of mind; ult. a proper view of oneself
 - a. **note**: humility is *not* the opposite of pride, *if* pride is “*thinking more highly of yourself than you ought*” (i.e. thinking “less” of yourself than you ought; **Romans 12:3**)
 - 1. this definition leads only to *self-deprecation*: “lowering” or debasing your true self
 - b. pride = perceiving yourself through a *self-centered lens*, rather than understanding yourself as God sees you (i.e. in truth; e.g. the temptation of Eve in **Genesis 3:5** – to be “like” God)
 - 1. in the ancient (Greek) world, pride was considered a *virtue* – you “advanced” with it (**today?**)
 - 2. pride is rebellion because the proud attribute to themselves the honor that belongs to God
 - c. humility = an honest appraisal of yourself as God sees you: a sinner saved by his mercy
 - 1. (**again**) *not a lack of confidence* or assurance in what you know (today considered arrogance)
 - 2. rather, an honest sense of recognizing your *equality* with everyone else saved by grace
 - a. what Paul means in **Gal. 3:28**: the former distinctions erased by the application of grace
 - d. **principle: humility is essential to our unity in the church, because how we compare others to ourselves will directly correspond to how we treat them (and how the world sees us!)**
- 3. “patience” (“bearing ...”) = forbearance; long-suffering; lit. a willingness to wait for others
 - a. patience = the capacity to tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset
 - 1. **IOW**: in day-to-day matters, the willingness to accept the “faults” or “shortcomings” of others
 - b. patience = recognizing and *embracing* that not everyone is “at the same place” spiritually
 - 1. **clarification**: Paul never assumes nor teaches that every believer should be at the same place on the spiritual journey to Christlikeness (including depth of doctrinal knowledge)
 - 2. however, he expects that those who are further along the spiritual “spectrum” are to *patiently* help those “behind the curve” to move in that direction (**2 Tim. 4:2**)
“preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”
 - c. **principle: patience is essential to our unity in the church, because how we react to others will directly correspond to how we treat them (and how the world sees us!)**
- 4. “love” (“the bond of peace”) = lit. *agape*; the affection that God has for his own
 - a. love = a deep and abiding relationship built on the basis of the entire character of God
 - 1. **IOW**: relating to each other on the basis of how God relates to us (i.e. no longer seeing us as dead sinners, but seeing us fully clothed with the righteousness of Christ)
 - 2. thus, believers are to love one another with that kind of “sight” – seeing each other as fully deserving of the best of our intentions, evaluations, expectations, etc. (**1 Cor. 13:4-7**)
“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
 - b. **principle: love is essential to our unity in the church, because how we relate to others will directly correspond to how we treat them (and how the world sees us!)**
- e. the unity in the Spirit
 - 1. **the “worthy” walk is one that is based on a proper view of oneself, a proper view of others, and a desire to treat one another as God treats us knowing particularly how he sees us**

II. The Unity in the Body (Ephesians 4:4-6)

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a. the motivation of the worthy Christian life

- 1. **IOW**: those things that should *drive* us to walk in the “unity of the Spirit”
- 2. (**again**) Paul uses the word “one” here as an adjective before a number of elements to drive home the point that our motivation flows out of a *singleness* within the purpose of God
- 3. “one Spirit” = one Person who calls effectually for a people, one instigator
 - a. there is only one *agent* of redemption in the world, and it is *not* by human authority
- 4. “one body” = one union of persons drawn together by the Spirit, one church
 - a. there is only one *true church*, and it is not divided by ethnicity, geography, etc.

5. *“one hope”* = one true end or purpose *“to your call”*, one purpose
 - a. there is only one purpose to any person being saved, and it is not really about them
6. *“one Lord”* = one center and honoree of redemption, one center
 - a. there is only one master to which any saved person must answer, and it is not themselves
7. *“one faith”* = one fundamental set of beliefs that distinguishes the elect, one belief-system
 - a. there is only one set of truth that distinguishes Christianity, and it is not man-centered
8. *“one baptism”* = one visible testimony to regeneration, one connection to Christ
 - a. there is only one rite in the church which points to our everlasting connection to Christ
9. *“one God and Father”* = one Person who is at the heart of redemption, one who decrees
 - a. there is only one who has decided these matters and has put them into motion
10. **the motivation to a *“worthy”* walk is to be overwhelmed by the *“singleness”* of God’s plan of redemption: the one Spirit creates the one body, which holds one hope in one Lord through one faith made visible in one baptism, to the glory of one Father over it all**
 - a. there should *never* be strife amongst the people of God because we are *absolutely equal* in every aspect of the concept of redemption