

Unity and Diversity

Ephesians: Display of God's Glory

Ephesians 4:1-16

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Unity and Diversity

Celebrate diversity! This seems to be the message in America today. But is diversity a good thing in and of itself? It seems like many today think diversity is a good thing no matter what.

But diversity by itself doesn't actually work. No, it causes division and wars at both a personal and political level. The only way diversity can be celebrated is if there is unity in the midst of diversity. That's the Bible's view of beautiful diversity.

Have you seen the advertisements all over town for the Persian rug store that is going out of business? A Persian rug is beautiful because there are many colors that form a unified whole. A pile of diverse colored yarn is not beautiful in and of itself. But when it is woven together in unity by a master designer, it is beautiful. Diversity is beautiful where there is unity.

From among all (diverse) peoples, God is saving a (unified) people for himself—diversity united in Christ. And as we'll see this morning, Christ gives a diversity of gifts to his church with the purpose of building unity in his church. Unity is the result of God's cosmic plan of salvation—his plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:9-10).

We'll see how this works out in the church this morning.

Ephesians 4:1-16¹

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This is the Word of the Lord.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

Sermon in a Sentence: Christ gives diverse gifts to the church; we should use them to build unity in the church.

I'd like to divide our time this morning by first looking at God's call for us to build unity. Then we'll see how God uses our diversity to build unity.

GOD URGES UNITY. (vv. 1-6)

Over the last couple of months we've covered the first half of Ephesians, chapters 1-3. Today we begin the second half of Ephesians, chapters 4-6. Generally speaking, Ephesians moves from theology to practicality. The first half of the book deals with theology.² We come this morning to the practical part of the book of Ephesians.

Walking in a manner worthy of our calling

Ephesians 4:1 says, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

What is our calling? Let me give a brief summary of the theology in Ephesians 1-3. In Christ...

- we were chosen before the foundation of the world,
- we have redemption through his blood,
- we have obtained an inheritance,
- we were sealed with the Holy Spirit,
- we were dead, but we have been made alive together with Christ,
- we were separated from God, but now we have been brought near by the blood of Christ,
- we are now fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God,
- we are a holy temple, being built into a dwelling place for God, both Jews and Gentiles,
- we are one church,
- all for the display of the glory of God.

This is our calling. Ephesians 1-3 deals with all of these theological truths. Now, in Ephesians 4-6 we're being called practically to live a life that is worthy of this calling.

Our calling is who we are. And it is a result of what God has done in Christ. Now, who we are in Christ should inform what we do. We should walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

My Hebrew professor, Dr. Magary, used to tell a story about going to church on Sunday mornings. His dad was a pastor. And every Sunday when they would pull into the church, his dad would turn around to his boys in the back seat and say to them, "Remember who you are! You are my sons. You are Magarys. Remember that this morning." What did Dr. Magary's dad want? He wanted them to act in a way that would bring honor to their father. So he reminded his boys of who they were.

In the same way, we've been reminded of who we are in Christ for three chapters. Now we're being called to live in a way that is consistent with our identity in Christ. And when this happens, we'll bring honor and glory to God. We are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

And the first thing that we are called to do is to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). God urges his church to build unity. And this practical command is grounded in the

² Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*.

theological reality that we are already unified. Jews and Gentiles are already one church (2:11-22). Or as verse 4 says, “There is one body.”

It’s also grounded in who God is. The God who called us is also one. There is only one God, but that one God exists in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Look at verse 4. There is one Spirit who has called us to one hope. Look at verse 5. There is one Lord (speaking of the Son). And our one faith and one baptism are in the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And look at verse 6. There is one Father of all. There is one God existing in three persons.

We are called to be eager to maintain unity. This practical command is grounded in the theological reality that we are already one body and we are one body because of the one God who called us.

Already, but not yet unified

We are already unified in one body. But we have not yet attained the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God as verse 13 says. Therefore, right now we are urged to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace until we attain unity.

Some of you may have read in the paper this week that Koch Industries just acquired the electronics company Molex for \$7.2 billion. This is the second largest company Koch has ever acquired. Other companies include Georgia Pacific and Invista. When Koch acquires a company there is a sense in which that company is already one with Koch. They are already united. But there is another sense in which that company has not yet been united with Koch. They are still in the process of becoming one with Koch. They need to learn Koch’s principles, practices, and procedures to become fully united and aligned with Koch.

Richard Anderson, one of our elders, has a really cool job. His division at Koch has the responsibility of going into companies like Georgia Pacific, Invista, and Molex to teach them Charles Koch’s principles of business, as well as the practices and processes that have made Koch successful. Richard’s job is to bring these acquired companies into unified alignment with Koch Industries. Although these companies are already unified with Koch, Richard’s job is to build and maintain that unity until unity is fully accomplished.

In the church, we have a similar job as Richard’s. Although we’re already united in Christ, we still need to grow in our alignment to God’s principles and practices. We need to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. And so we have the responsibility to build and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This is part of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

The priority of a unified body

Of all the things we’re called to do to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, this is the first thing Paul lists.

Before purity, before our marriages, before our relationship with our children, before our relationships in the work place, and before our war against the spiritual forces of evil, we’re called to

build and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in the local church. This is a priority for the one church called by the one God.³

Is it a priority for you to build unity in the church? What is a priority to you?

In order to answer that question, we need to answer another question. How do we build unity in the church?

GOD USES DIVERSITY TO BUILD UNITY. (vv. 7-16)

God gives diverse gifts to build unity.

While it is true that we are one unified body (vv. 1-6), it is also true that we are diverse. God is calling one unified people to himself from among all diverse peoples of the earth. That's one way we're diverse. But the main diversity Paul wants to draw out here is found in verse 7.

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” While we’re one body, a grace gift was given to each one of us individually. There is a diversity of gifts in the body of Christ. Each one of us in the body of Christ has been given a spiritual gift to build up the body of Christ.

Christ declares in the book of Matthew that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18). And we’re told in Ephesians 2 that we are being built into a dwelling place for God (v. 22). Well, how does the victorious Christ build his church? He does it by using each one of us! This is a remarkable truth. Christ builds his church, but he uses us to build it. And Christ gives each of us tools and talents to use in his building project. He gives us each grace gifts.

But not only does he give each one in his church spiritual gifts for building up his church, he also gives special ministers of the Word to equip each one to build the church.

Look at verses 11-12. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

While we’re all ministers in the church, these four types of people listed in verse 11 are the official ministers in the church. Their job is not to do all of the work of ministry themselves. Christ has not given the church a bunch of professionals to do all of the work. No, but God has given a group of people to the church with special gifts in the ministry of the Word. Their job is to equip everyone else for doing the work of ministry. How do the four types of ministers in verse 11 equip the saints for the work of ministry?

The apostles and prophets are no longer around. They had a foundational role in establishing the church in the first century. As we’re told in 2:20, the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The apostles were the twelve disciples, Paul, and a few others who saw the risen Christ and were appointed apostles by him. The prophets were those who preached in association with the apostles. The apostles and prophets were given to the church after Christ’s ascension to get the church

³ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

established. They continue to be a gift to the church, but not in person. No, their ministry is recorded in writing, in the canonical books which we call the New Testament.⁴

But the evangelists and pastor/teachers are still given as a gift to the church.

The evangelists preach the gospel given to us by the apostles and prophets. The evangelists are like an OB doctor (obstetrician). They are used by God in the birthing process. They preach the gospel and, through their gospel, God delivers new spiritual babies. Many missionaries and church planters serve in an official role of evangelist.

The pastor/teachers teach the gospel given to us by the apostles and prophets. If the evangelists are like obstetricians, the pastor/teachers are like pediatricians.⁵ We are involved in building up the newborn spiritual babies in the church until they arrive at maturity. Pastor/teachers are the primary official minister in the church you interact with.

When Paul lists pastors and teachers, he's not speaking of two offices. He only has one office in mind.⁶ All pastors are required to be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:1-2). But not all teachers are called to be pastors. The office that is in view in verse 11 is the pastor/teacher office.⁷ This office includes pastors who get a paycheck as well as lay elders who do not get a paycheck.

So the church is built by each one in the church. God gives a grace gift to each one. But God also gives an official group of ministers to the church. These are the people the church recognizes or ordains for a special ministry of preaching and teaching the Word of God. They are given to the church to equip everyone in the church for the work of the ministry.

But why is it necessary for the church to be given official evangelists and pastor/teachers who have a special ministry of teaching and preaching the Word of God? Well it has to do with what each person in the church is called to do and, therefore, what each person in the church needs equipped to do.

We're called to build up the body until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The call to build unity in the body is the call to bring people to maturity in Christ. That's the definition of what it means to build and maintain unity. That's what each of you are called to do. You're each called to do the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ until we all attain maturity in Christ. But how do we attain maturity in Christ?

Look at verse 15. We come to maturity in Christ by speaking the truth in love. That's how we grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. We are all called to speak the truth in love. We're all called to minister the Word. Therefore, we all need to know what the truth is. The evangelists and pastor/teachers in the church have the unique job of helping everybody in the church know what the truth is so that they can speak the truth. For it is only as they speak the truth that the church will come to maturity.

Last week we said that maturity is impossible without understanding and knowing love. Children that grow up in an environment where they do not know love will experience damage developmentally, especially emotional and social development. Whereas children that grow up in an

⁴ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*.

⁵ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*.

⁶ Cf. Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*; John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*; and Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*.

⁷ Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*.

environment where they know love deeply have a much better chance of healthy social and emotional development.

But we need more than the nurture of love to mature. We also need good nutrition. We need a healthy diet to develop physically. Children who are malnourished or even experience starvation will not mature physically the way they should. Whereas children that have a healthy and balanced diet have a better chance of healthy physical development.

The same is true spiritually. In order to come to maturity, we need the nurture of love and the nutrition of the truth. We need to speak the truth in love.

We need a healthy diet of the Word of God, the truth. New babies in the faith need “pure spiritual milk” to “grow up to salvation” (1 Pt. 2:2). Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4).

If we are going to grow spiritually to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, then we need to speak the truth in love. We need good nurture and good nutrition. That’s how we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (v. 15).

When most people think of the famous line in this chapter, speak the truth in love, they think of confronting people. If you’re going to set somebody straight, you need to do it in a loving way, right? Well that’s not the main thing verse 15 means when it calls us to speak the truth in love. The main thing being taught here is that spiritual maturity comes as we speak the gospel to one another and the truths that flow out of the gospel.

The “truth” being spoken of here is not just saying what is true. It is speaking of the central truth in the Bible. It is spelled out for us in chapter 1, verse 13. “The word of truth” is “the gospel of your salvation.” It is the central truth that Christ died for our sins and all of the related truths to that central truth. It is “the faith” spoken of in verse 13, which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This is the truth we’re called to speak to one another in love!

The Word of God does the work of God in building Christ’s church. And each one of us is called to speak this word of truth, the gospel, to people in the body of Christ. Each one of us is called to a ministry of the Word. This is called discipleship. Christ builds his church as we speak his Word into the lives of people in the power of the Holy Spirit. And Christ builds his church as we call people to live their lives in conformity to the Word of God.

We all have this ministry! Regardless of what your spiritual gift is, you’re called to speak the truth in love. It’s not just a ministry given to the official, professional pastor/teachers and evangelists.

But your pastor/teachers are given to you for a very important reason. We are called to help make sure the truth is clearly understood by everyone in the church so that everyone in the church can speak the truth accurately. We’re called to feed, lead, and protect.

We are called to feed the flock on the Word of God, the gospel. We are called to protect the flock from false gospels. We are called to protect the flock from living lives that are inconsistent with the gospel. We are called to lead the church in ways that are faithful with the Word of God, the gospel. This involves creating programs to help you grow in your knowledge of the Word of God. This involves crafting worship services that help form you in the Word of God.

This is what it means to pastor the flock that is in our care. We are ministers of the Word. This is our job. But it is for a purpose. It is to equip you for your job, for your ministry of the Word.

If we do our job faithfully, you are seeing modeled and being taught what it means to speak the truth to others in the body so that you can build up the body of Christ. That's your job. And as verse 16 says, when each part is working properly, Christ makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

We're all called to this ministry of speaking the truth in love. And this is how Christ builds his church. That's amazing. That's profound. What should you do with this amazing responsibility?

Some do nothing. Some Christians are spiritual consumers. They come to church when they want, to get what they want. They sit in the pew and if they like the songs they might sing. If they like the sermon they might listen. They take what they want and leave the rest. And they rarely get involved in the work of ministry. They show up a little late and they leave as soon as possible.

But that's not what Christ intended for his church.

No, Christ will build his church. And he intends to use his people to get to work building his church. This is the first thing it means to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

Therefore, we need to take the ministry of the pastor/teachers in the church seriously and we need to take our own ministry seriously.

How can you take the ministry of the leaders in the church seriously?

We're not up here to entertain you. Everything we do, though not perfect, is to equip you for the work of the ministry. I challenge you to fully engage in every part of our services. They're designed to form you in the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation so that you will be equipped to speak the truth in love. I challenge you to get involved in our ABFs and Classes to learn the truth. We believe that as you gain a deeper knowledge of the truth you'll be equipped to speak the truth in more effective ways.

How can you take your own ministry of the Word seriously?

If you have the gift of teaching, I challenge you to get involved in teaching in the church. Get involved in Children's Ministry, Student Ministry, or Adult Classes. Everybody's busy. Are you busy with the right things? If you're a teacher, use your gifts of teaching the truth in love.

If you don't have the gift of teaching, don't teach. But I challenge each of you to get involved in some kind of discipleship. Whether that's a small group, an ABF, or a one on one mentoring relationship, we all need a place where we can speak the truth in love right into one another's real life.

And I challenge each of you to make the best use of every moment. When you're in the courtyard before and after church, what are you talking about? The time is short, speak the truth in love. When you're out to lunch with a friend, what are you talking about? The time is short, speak the truth in love. When you're talking with your spouse or your children over dinner, in the car, at bedtime, what are you talking about? The time is short, speak the truth in love.

This is how we grow in unity to spiritual maturity. Speak the truth.

But we're called to do more than just speak the truth. We're called to speak the truth in love. It's amazing how many people who know so much of the truth – sound doctrine, etc. – are so cold and seem so absent of love. But remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:1-2? “If I speak in the tongue of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love I am nothing.”

Through the Word of truth, the gospel, we learn of the amazing love of God. This love should motivate our truth speaking. This love should also inform the way we speak the truth. It must be in love. Our eagerness to build unity in the church comes from love.

Spiritual maturity requires good nourishment; we must give people the pure spiritual milk, the Word of God. We must speak the truth. But we must do it in the nurture of love.

Christ builds his church. But he does that through each one of us. Yes, he uses pastor/teachers in that process. But our main job is to equip you for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. And as verse 16 says, when each part is working properly, Christ makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Diversity in and of itself is not beautiful. But when diverse people with diverse gifts are united by one God around the one gospel of Jesus Christ and begin working together to build Christ's church in love, it is amazing. It's beautiful. It's a display of the glory of God.

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Advantages of Unity in Diversity: Unity is diversity is a term that is used as an expression of unity and harmony among various groups of people with very dissimilar traits, culture and lives. This concept is also known by many other terms such as "œdiversity without fragmentation" and "œunity without uniformity". The concept focuses on building tolerance to various areas such as culture, language, society, religion, politics and physical characteristics. The term is rather old and it dates back to ancient times.

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