

The Unity of the Body – Part 5

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 **analogy** of unity for the church
 - a. the “golf ball” analogy now replaced by a **body** analogy
 1. the individual organs as believers, walking in a form of **piety**: humility, patience, and love
 2. the organs producing an **organic unity**, serving each other using spiritual gifts; not as “cogs” in a machine, but as an interdependent singular unit with a common goal
 3. the body held together by a **doctrinal unity**, a “skin” that wraps the body, protecting it and holding it together; giving the body a cohesiveness within which everything else happens
 - a. as the “**gifts**” given by Christ to the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers who:
 - b. equip the saints for the work of ministry, building up the body through the work of engaging the **minds** of believers, teaching them doctrine and theology, growing them to a state of maturity, to the fullness of Christ in allegiance, purity, and holiness
 4. **Paul believes that the unity of the church is held together doctrinally – that the body has been given specific spiritual functions designed to create a layer of “protection” that holds the church’s organic unity together around the central truths of the faith**
2. the **importance** of this doctrinal unity for the church
 - a. “so that” (v. 14) = what is produced (happens); what is protected (doesn’t happen); or, the (implied) reality of what is **expected** of believers; or, the (explicit) reality of what **will come** against believers
 - b. **LOW**: Paul is deeply concerned that Christians have a solid doctrinal foundation ... because there is danger lurking, and this danger can be **fatal**
 - c. or (using the body analogy), the body cannot survive if its outer layer fails to hold it together – the internal operations of the body require the outer skin for cohesiveness and protection

III. The Unity in the Faith (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Content

c. the dangers protected by the four functions given to the body (v. 14)

1. the danger of **heresy** = belief or opinion contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine; views of the Christian faith that are contrary to the expressed nature of Scripture and its most clearly taught interpretation within church history
 - a. contra **heterodoxy** = belief or opinion contrary to a *given set* of Christian doctrine (**i.e.** within a particular strand of Christianity) that is subject to opinion or interpretation, but has not been ideally settled within the larger strand of Christian tradition (**e.g.** millennialism)
 - b. heretical beliefs deny specific strands of orthodox Christianity that are essential to the faith itself (**e.g.** the Triune nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of salvation by faith, etc.)
 - c. Paul uses several terms **here** referring to this idea:
 1. “**the waves**” = a picture of the “up and down” nature of beliefs as they pass through time
 - a. **e.g.** the ancient heresy of **Arianism** – that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was begotten by God the Father *at a certain point in time*, thus is distinct from the Father *by nature* and is subordinate to him – condemned at Nicea in 325AD, but revived by Jehovah’s Witnesses
 2. “**every wind**” = something “always floating around,” never fully done away with

- a. **e.g.** the ancient heresy of **Gnosticism** – the belief that the material world is inherently evil and that it is only those with a certain *gnosis* (knowledge) that are able to escape it to a “higher plain” of existence – specifically, Christ could not be fully human because God would never deign to enter into a material world
 1. explaining why the concept of the resurrection is virtually gone from Christian belief
 2. explaining why so many Christians fail to see Jesus as the Godman forever
 3. explaining why the view of heaven is often treated as more ethereal than real
 3. “*human cunning*” = the never-ending parade of false teachers pulling believers away from truth
 - a. **e.g.** men like Joel Osteen et. al. who **prey** on believers by quoting enough Scripture to make it “appear” as though they are teaching orthodoxy, but (in reality) are using *prevailing cultural tendencies* to entice Christians to follow them (**2 Peter 2:1-3a**)

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words ...”

 1. denying the true spiritual realities present in humanity (**i.e.** sin, death, separation)
 2. appealing to the “base” nature of humans and focusing attention *only* on the physical
 3. ignoring the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian orthodoxy
 4. “*deceitful schemes*” = religious systems that “masquerade” as Christian, but deny orthodoxy
 - a. **e.g.** Roman Catholicism, widely accepted by the world as the *de facto* version of Christianity, but which *dogmatically* embraces and demands adherence to clearly extra-biblical concepts (**i.e.** the Marion dogmas, purgatory, the propitiatory nature of the Mass, indulgences, etc.)
 - b. **e.g.** evangelical moralism (MTD) – the central teaching amongst modern Baptists that the core of Christianity is *horizontal moral behavior* rather than faith in and obedience to Christ
 1. **i.e.** “be better” as the best summary of most Baptist preaching
 - d. Paul speaks of other kinds of heresy *elsewhere* (**Colossians 2:6-8**):

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

 1. “*philosophy*” = worldly ways of understanding life and death (**e.g.** secularism, materialism)
 2. “*human tradition*” = the elevation of certain rituals and practices in the church over preaching
 - a. a form of heresy that has killed more Baptist churches than other single method of attack
 3. “*elemental spirits*” = the embracing of pagan ideas and practices in the church
 - e. **Paul knows that the church of Jesus Christ will always struggle to hold its truth against the myriad of outside forces desiring to destroy it – that is why doctrinal teaching in the church is so important: to keep believers protected**
2. the danger of **apostasy** = the abandonment or renunciation of a political or religious belief; to “walk away” from the faith, either in outright denunciation or in a gradual decline from orthodoxy (**i.e.** a drifting away from what was once understood to be true)
 - a. apostasy is the opposite of perseverance – the steady faithfulness of a true follower of Christ *even through obstacles* vs. the abandonment of belief very often *because of obstacles* (**see above**)
 - b. Paul uses two (2) phrases here to describe this possibility:
 1. “*tossed to and fro*” = never settling on a set of truth; moving from one belief to another
 2. “*carried about [off]*” = lit. taken away from what is true by an outside force
 - c. the N.T. gives a number of warnings regarding apostasy
 1. **John 15:1-6** – in the analogy of the true vine, the warning about branches that produce no fruit
 2. **Mark 4:3-20** – in the Sower and the Seed, the warning of the shallow or weedy soil
 3. **Hebrews 6:1-8 (read)** – those who have “tasted” the things of Spirit, but fall away
 - a. those who have an *external* façade of salvation, but no inward reality of it
 - b. the falling way *stems* from a lack of training in doctrine and maturity (**read 5:11-14**)
 - d. the two (2) forms of apostasy that appear in the church today:
 1. those who abandon orthodoxy and *leave the church* (**1 John 2:18-19**)

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come ... They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”
 2. those who abandon orthodoxy and *stay in the church* (**Matthew 7:21-23**)

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

 - a. specifically, they work to “mold” the church to suit their own heterodoxy (**2 Tim. 4:3-4**)

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”
 - e. **Paul knows that the church of Jesus Christ needs consistent and competent doctrinal teaching to hold true believers together – that is why doctrinal teaching in the church is so important: to keep believers grounded**