

“Diversity in Unity, 1”

(Ephesians 4:1-16)

January 10, 2009

Order of Worship for Sunday, January 10, 2010, Communion

Pre-service song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment:

Call to Worship: Psalm 68:1-6 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“We Have Come To Worship”

Song # 207

“All Heaven Declares”

Overhead

“All Hail The Power of Jesus’ Name”

Song # 43

“O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Song # 686

Offering

Special Music:

Message: “Getting Ready, 2” (1Thessalonians 4:9-12 & 5:1-11)

Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“Our God Reigns”

Song # 372

Parting Word of Grace

VESPERS

5:30 P.M. in the Library

We will be studying Article #5 of the Statement of Faith

What we believe regarding the work of Christ

“The Prayer Closet”

January 10, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Caring for Women:** that the transition to new facilities will broaden both community support and effective ministry; that the ministry will secure greater financial support; that in union with the churches they will see a shift in community values against abortion and to openness to the Lord; that the board and staff will be greatly encouraged in the Lord
2. **President Barak Obama:** that he will separate from ideological prejudice and party dominance; that he will protect his family from the dangers of both political power and great wealth; that he will learn to walk humbly with God]
3. **Children’s Ministries and all teachers:** that the teachers will return refreshed by the Christmas break; that the students will quickly regain focus in their classes; that new families will be drawn into the classes
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: Pvt. Joshua Nelson** (nephew of Lori Dresler): that he continue in safety.
5. **College Student of the Week: Rebecca Hammonds** (daughter of Tom and Cindy Hammonds): graduated in December with BA in Theater with Magna Cum Laude honors from California Baptist University. She will be home until Fall when she will pursue graduate school, until then she plans to be very active in church.

Today we continue with our study of Ephesians. “Diversity in Unity, Part I” [is the title for today’s message]. We have not been in Ephesians for almost a month and a half. We are looking at Ephesians 4:1-16, actually picking up our study at v. 7, but we will read the entire sections so as to awaken our minds again to the larger context. Follow as I read the word of the Lord.

“I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worth of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [Here Paul has given a great affirmation of the unity of the body of Christ. Now we go on and this statement I would underline if I were doing a study for it represents a transition in Paul’s concern.]

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 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, 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, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and from by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from 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.”

That is probably the [most] central and defining statement regarding the nature of the church that you will find in all of scripture. That is why we are tarrying here as long as we are. It is my contention, and I have shared it with this congregation many times, that in this age it is not primarily the doctrine of salvation – that is, justification through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, that is most at issue: that was the great issue at the Reformation. In this age the church no longer knows who she is. The church has forgotten what it means to be the body of Christ and has drifted far away from the scriptural understanding. So when we gather as the body of Christ we no longer know who we are or how we are supposed to be the body and to carry out the witness for the Lord Jesus Christ which we have been asked to do. We have turned the church into something for our convenience and pleasure rather than remembering that it is called together by God at His pleasure and for His purposes and for His glory, that we would witness to His truth and bear that truth to a dying world. We need to be refocused, and that is what we are endeavoring to do.

As with the word “therefore” in v. 1, so the word “but” at the beginning of v.7 means that we must be sure of what the writer has just said before that because what will now be said will immediately relate to it. In vv. 1-6, therefore, of this passage, Paul has just stressed the paramount need for each member of the body of Christ to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is at the heart of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called. In conducting that walk, however, it is essential to know, and we soon realize, that we are differently gifted by Christ. We are not

equal. The instantaneous moment when you hear that statement “...we are not equal in Christ” as good Americans you should cringe, for it is at the center of our culture today to insist that all are equal. But that is not what scripture says. We are not all equal in Christ when it comes to our giftedness. And inevitably when you begin to deal with that reality, you begin to recognize that there are tension that arise within the community in terms of mutual understanding and appreciation and being able to cooperate and work side by side. We have each received grace according, we are told, to the measure of Christ’s gift. As the teaching on spiritual gifts and leadership in Romans, I Corinthians, the Pastoral Epistles and the General Epistles, as they are usually referred to, as well as Ephesians itself make clear, the measure of Christ’s gifts to different people differs. Therefore within the unity of the body is a divinely given diversity in its members. That is the opening statement or thesis for us to hang on to as we reflect on what Paul has to say in these verses.

As regards the unity of the body, I would bring us back again to John 17:16-23. I encourage all to turn to that passage. Jesus there is actually engaged in prayer. He is talking to His Father. This is the end of what is called the Upper Room discourse. He is praying to His Father in anticipation of His crucifixion and then the resurrection that will follow. If we understand the fullness of scripture we know that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the key, the necessary step in order for the Lord Jesus Christ to send the Holy Spirit back down [from heaven to earth] to enter into the hearts and minds of those who believe in Him, and it is the Spirit of God that brings to life the church, at Pentecost. These are essential steps in us becoming what God wants us to be. We need to understand them and appreciate them. Jesus here reminds us why He has done all this. This is what Jesus says. *“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”* Jesus says three important things that we must remember in these particular statements. The first is that we are not of the world though we have been sent into it. We are not of the world, but we are sent into it, exactly like Jesus himself. That is the first of the three statements. The second: the way in which we are not of the world is because we have been set apart and sanctified – that is saying almost the same thing, made holy – consecrated to the purpose of God through the truth. We are truth-bearers, that is what we are called to be; that is what we are sanctified to be; that is why Jesus poured out His blood. We tend to say, “Jesus died for me; that is why He poured out His blood.” Then we tend to say, “...so I can go to heaven.” Then we say nothing more. But that is not what the Bible says. What the Bible says is that Jesus poured out His blood in order that you and I would be sanctified for the truth. So the question arises: do I know the truth? The third thing, in addition to becoming truth-bearers and servants of the truth, we realize that Jesus consecrated Himself specifically for that purpose. That is what He says.

We continue at v.20: *“I do not ask for these only – referring to the eleven disciples in the room with Him, Judas having already left – 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 in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that You have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”* Here we learn the importance of the unity. The importance of that unity is so that the world will believe that Jesus was sent by the Father. Jesus says it twice. The second time He adds that this unity will demonstrate that we are loved by the Father just as He was loved. That needs to be our aspiration. Our aspiration needs to be that the quality of our life together would be such that people looking at and reflecting about this life that that group of people live together

says of them “O, that’s Jesus! I see, that’s Jesus. That is who that is. That is the demonstration that it was the Father who sent the Son and the Son died for them and the Spirit of Jesus lives in them that Jesus might be seen.”

Notice, however, that between these two affirmations comes v.22, a critically important statement by the Lord Jesus Christ when it comes to this issue of unity. There Jesus, in v. 22, refers to “glory.” There is a variety of ways of understanding glory. Glory is the magnificence of power. Old Testament: massivity, weight; New Testament: radiance, brilliance. That refers to the literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek terms. I have put them together as “the magnificence of power.” It is the reason that if the Lord Jesus Christ in His resurrected state were to stand suddenly here in our presence everyone of us would hit the ground because we would be overwhelmed with the radiance of His presence. That is what I am talking about. What Jesus says in v.22 is that the glory which the Father has given to Him, He has given to you. The glory which the Father gave to Him He has given to you! That is worth thinking about.

What was the magnificent power evidence in the life of Jesus? Well, we could do a survey of the gospels, and I highly recommend it to anyone here. But this would be my conclusion: the magnificence of the power of Jesus is not seen in stilling the storm; the magnificence of the power of Jesus is not seen in multiplying the loaves. For the Creator God, those are easy things. But there is a not-easy thing that we see, a hugely not-easy thing in the life of Jesus. The not-easy thing was to love sinners, but Jesus loved sinners. We know that the reason we are here today is that Jesus loved sinners enough to die for them, and that power has been given to you and me. It is the power of gentleness and patience in the face of the endless provocations in the lost. It is the power to overcome sin and temptation, for that is what Jesus did when He took upon Himself our condition and subjected himself to all of the things that we need to endure, and in the end He is sinless. That power has been given to us. It is the power to live by faith. There are few statements in the gospels that more amaze me whenever I read them (and as most of you know I read them on a fairly regular basis and I’m still amazed every time I read them) as when Jesus says, “Everything I say and everything I do is only what I have heard from My Father, nothing else.” So Jesus embodies the perfection of submission and obedience to the Father. That power He has given to us. Glory!

What Jesus says is the reason that we have received this magnificence of power is so that you and I can live in unity to demonstrate the reality that the Father loves us and that the Father sent Jesus. Last week were talking in the after-sermon class when we debrief on the sermon following the questions that are in the bulletin, and we got to talking a little about what it means to share the gospel, to be a witness for Jesus Christ and I made this statement by which I stand: never in the scriptures at any place does it ever say that people will be saved on the basis of the clarity with which you present the gospel. You can present the gospel with absolute clarity and the unbroken will reject it. But what Jesus says here is, when people encounter the reality of the glory of God living in the hearts and lives of a group of people such that the character of the Lord Jesus Christ is demonstrated in the way they treat one another and the walk together down the road: under the impact of that evidence, they know. It is the magnificence of glory.

There is one more truth we need to pick up out of John 17 before we return to Ephesians in order to look at the unity of the body. It is found in v.14. Please turn and notice what Jesus says. Jesus says speaking to His Father and in the hearing of His disciples, *“I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.”* This is describing us. What do we see in that brief statement? There are three essential truths that we need to put away in our understanding

in 17:14. First, Jesus gave His followers His Words. How precious is that gift! Second, we are hated by the world. Third, we are hated by the world because we have received the words of Jesus, and we are therefore not of the world. Because the Christian has received life and hope and truth, the authoritative Word of God from God and not from the world, they hate us.

What does it mean to be hated? What are the shapes and forms of the world’s hatred? I have put together a complicated list; I apologize that I have crammed as many words on this slide as I could, so you will just have to do the best you can! These are the shapes, the forms, the expressions of hatred that I think at least begins to talk about when we encounter the world in its hatred for us as the bearers of the truth, the Word of God: scorn, mockery, indifference, contempt, treated as stupid, ignorant, irrelevant, primitive, out of date, superstitious, prejudiced, backward, mentally incompetent, hidebound, narrow minded, obstructionist, obscurantist, laughable, judgmental, hateful, condemning and more. What do you think? All of these and many more accusations are laid at the feet of Christians. But at the very same time Jesus assures us that non-believers seeing our unity know that we have God’s truth and that we are loved by God and that Jesus Himself, the One we follow and serve, was in fact sent by God.

How many know of Brit Hume, the commentator who made the observation regarding Tiger Woods, that in the mess Tiger Woods has made of his life – which is worse than just a mess as it is in fact hypocrisy – he made the observation that what Tiger Woods needs is not his Buddhism, which has no forgiveness of sin for it has no clear concept of God, but what he needs is Jesus Christ and His forgiveness? In response all kinds of anger and accusations have been thrown at Brit Hume because he was so arrogant as to speak to Tiger Woods about Jesus Christ. Someone made the observation that if he had said to him that he needed to see a psychologist would any one have objected, and the answer is no; but mention Jesus and world goes ballistic. But you and I should not expect anything else, because Jesus said, the world hates us because we have the Word, and the Word is not from the world, and the world knows it.

This has consequences for life together. In order for us to effectively carry out the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, what Paul has said is that we need the Christian virtues. This is a summary, re-covering the ground so that we are up to speed. What are the Christian virtues? This is how we began the chapter. The Christian virtues are these: humility or lowliness; gentleness; patience; bearing with one another in love. Next week we are going to be praying, dedicating the new and continuing church officers. It is one of the great attributes of this congregation in my experience regarding the quality of the meetings that we hold together; they are almost entirely free of bitterness and accusation and conflict. We are able to speak together, reason together, come to common agreements, voice our difference of opinion, work them out and establish an agreed upon direction. You may think that is a small matter, if so, you haven’t been in other churches! My observation is that people will fight to the death for trivial matters, for it is easy to hook our ego on matters that we consider just personal and so others should not step on them! Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with a bunch of half-saved people: that is you! That is reality! We need to have humility. It does not have to be my way or the highway. I could very well be wrong. I mentioned last week that sometimes someone will walk up to me and say, “You’re the man, you’re the pastor, you’re in charge!” To which I immediately reply, “You are dead wrong. Jesus is in charge of the church. I’m just another servant.”

But it is not sufficient to have the virtues. There needs to be a core. That core, as we have looked at, are the seven unifying doctrines that govern the life of the church written in vv.4-6: one body, one Spirit, one

hope that is associated with our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is over all, in all, through all. He is the Father. He is the Father that sent Jesus. He is the Father who also sent us. That is the focal point.

It is implicit in Paul’s words to the Ephesians that the church faces hostile forces working against her internal harmony and stability. That is no less true today than it was in Paul’s day, and indeed today it may be worse than it was in Paul’s day. Hopefully we have enough acquaintance with the Word of God to enable us as a congregation to withstand the forces opposing the unity of the body, unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What do you think, when I talk like this – pastors talk like this and I often wonder what is going on in the brains of others when I talk like this – what are the forces? Here is a first little group: political affiliation (how many grew up and were told you were never to talk about two things: politics and religion. Why? Because you would get into a big argument!) What divides the body of Christ; it is political affiliation, political ideology and political correctness. How many recall the account of Robin and the Episcopalian priest Lucy which I mentioned last week? Robin was looking for a place to worship. She told the priest she had become politically conservative and wanted to find a non-politicized church. Lucy the priest said, “Go elsewhere.” There is an exhortation inside this, isn’t there. If this body of believers ever drives anybody away from this congregation because they do not have the “right” political opinions... Shall I say it again? If this congregation every drives anyone away from this church because they do not have the “right” political opinions, then you will stand in violation of the purposes of God. You cannot do that. But there are other sources of division: ethnic, social, economic, class. Then there are teachers and teachings – I am not going to try to illustrate all these for I would never get finished – worldly concerns.

Often you hear people speaking of their involvement in one church or another solely in terms of what the church does or does not do for them. Their view of the church is like a shoppers view of stores or someone’s view of a health club; does it make me happy; does it provide all the services and helps I want; are its services and schedule convenient for me, and so on. Now to be candid those are honest questions that need to be answered. But what appears to be missing in most of this is an awareness of the hostility of the world. Does it ever cross our minds that the unity and the stability of the local church is an aspect of the spiritual warfare of the age? I love “Lord of the Rings.” I have read it many times aloud to my children and I have watched the film [series] many times because I think Peter Jackson did a wonderful job. At one point when Gandalf the wizard is giving counsel to Frodo the Hobbit, and Frodo has the ring of power which was made by the Satan of that day, Gandalf tells Frodo he needs to know something about the ring: it wants evil to find it. Now I think there is an analogy. You know what happens when we gather as the body of Christ? We become the object of the intense hostility from the evil powers of the age and they want to destroy us. You need to know that. We need to understand that the thoughts and the feelings and the desires and the perspectives that we have, the nature of our involvement in the body of Christ invites trouble, and that trouble will speak to us in our souls, for it comes from the accuser and it whispers into our hearts. Ask yourselves: “If I am discontent, if I am unhappy, if I feel unsatisfied, is it because something has happened to me that ought not to be happening? Am I anticipating that the church will provide worldly satisfactions? Is that what I am expecting? Do I come with an expectation of the body of Christ which will not be met and therefore I have good and adequate reasons to complain and withdraw myself and sit in the position of humble superiority, commenting repeatedly on the failures of others to do the things that I know need to be done. O what a lofty position! So often the voices of those who complain come from the shadowed places of our hearts and minds and from people who stand in the

shadows and will not step forward into the full light of the conversation of the body of Christ and speak openly in order that they might be a part of a transparent and honest conversation dealing with the issues that confront the life of the body. Unity!

In the seventh verse of Ephesians 4, Paul introduces a second dominant reality regarding the church. The first dominant reality was unity. The second is diversity. Verses 7-10 are transitional and are often very difficult for us to understand or at least to appreciate. In these verses Paul is speaking of two things. Hear them again: *“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”* That is the relatively easy part. *“Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)”* That is a little obscure and we have a hard time with it. What Paul has done here is to cite Psalm 68. In the Psalm David celebrates the triumph of God in bringing His people into Israel into Canaan and Jerusalem as the resting place of God’s tabernacle. God’s plan was for Israel to be the kingdom of God’s people, first among all the kingdoms of the world. That was God’s plan. In a limited sense that is what happened under David and Solomon. In the Psalm either God or possibly David as God’s man, arrives in the city of Jerusalem as a conqueror and comes bringing gifts from the vanquished people round about. Paul takes this imagery from the ancient world. When the conqueror arrived at home, he distributed gifts freely to his own people. That is the connection with v. 7: Jesus having triumphed over the forces of evil through the resurrection – we read in Colossians 2:15, *“He disarmed the rulers, the authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.”* – so Jesus comes to his people and distributes gifts. Paul speaks of some of those gifts in v.11, which we will look at it a couple of weeks. First however in vv. 9-10 this is what he says. He appeals to the imagery of the psalm as proof of the pre-existence of Jesus. Look at that again. What he says specifically is, *“...the one who descended, ascended...”* He is referring to the coming back and forth between earth and heaven. Doesn’t that remind us of what Jesus said, that the church in its life together is to be a demonstration that the Father sent the Son, and that is exactly what is being described in these verses; that the Father sent the Son; that the Conqueror has come and conquered and gone back into the heavens and left gifts for you and for me. This is significant, because between the descent of the Son of God and the ascent of Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the Son of God as the man Jesus and it is this person, fully God and fully man, who now ascends above the heavens to fill all things. Here we see exactly what Jesus said we would see: the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is rooted in and built upon the word of God and demonstrates that Jesus was sent from heaven to be our Savior. Unity is to be secured not only by the Christian virtues and the seven unifying doctrines, but also by the diversity of gifts that we have received from the risen Lord.

It is in the exercise of the gifts we receive from the Lord Jesus Christ that we demonstrate the reality of Him being sent by the Father, because it is the love of the Father that flows through our gifts and touches others and binds us together as a family of faith. When we choose to do nothing and exercise no spiritual gift, we say no to the love of God, and we deaden the unity of the body.

It has often been observed that Ephesians and Colossians are sister letters. It is not, however, the suffering of Christ that is at the forefront of Paul’s thought, rather it is His triumph and glorification. In Ephesians chapters 1-3 Paul reviews what God had accomplished through Christ *“...to the praise of His glorious grace with which He has blessed us in the Beloved”* as we read in 1:6 and again in v.12 and finally again in the 14th verse of chapter 1: *“...to the praise of His glorious grace.”* That is us: we are to live to the praise

of His grace. This is what we are called to do. When we come down to the fourth chapter 1-16 Paul is giving the Ephesians the Father’s plan for the church, the body of Christ, the body which His Son purchased with His blood. Paul wants the church to understand this: the church is called to be worthy of the Savior Who died for her. Look again to the first verse of chapter 4. Worthy of Christ: Ephesians 1:10, “...*a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.*” Paul increases it in vv.19-23, to know “...*what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*” That is to us! Paul went on further in 2:4-7, saying of the church, “...*God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him* [do we see where we are seated? In the heavens! That is where we are seated! We have received the magnificence of the glory of the power of God and we are seated with God in the heavens. But how many of us will forget this Monday morning by ten o’clock. Did every wonder why? Because the world does not want you to remember.]

In chapter 3:10 this is what Paul says, “...*that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*” What is the most powerful institution in the United States of America today? It is the church. Why do you think the United States has gone the direction in which it has gone? Because there has been a vacuum of power; because the institution that was created by God to be a restraining force against the advance of evil stopped functioning, turned its view inward, decided to spend all of its time talking about itself and giving strokes to itself so it would feel happy and feel comfortable and be safe from a horrible world instead of taking and putting on the armor of Christ, walking boldly into the world and speaking the truth in spite of the fact that the world would hate it, because we forgot how to walk together in harmony and peace and therefore no one could see that within us was the indwelling Spirit of God, that we were Jesus on the face of the earth. The question which we have to face in the next ten to fifteen years is whether we will be the church of Jesus Christ or not. And even if the whole United State will fall in flames, which it may well, God says, “I take care of My children.”

Let’s pray: Our heavenly Father we thank You for the remarkable grace You have shown in sending your Son, giving to us the Spirit and the glory, that magnificence of power, that we like Him might love sinners, know how to work with patience, and demonstrate the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It is, Father, in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What, if any, steps do you actively take to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”?
2. If you were asked, how would answer the question, “What has Jesus sent you into the world to do for Him and for His people?”
3. Jesus told His disciples that He had given them His glory just as He had received glory from the Father. What do you think it is that keeps Christians from sensing and acting from that glory?
4. Do you think you must get people to love you before you can get them to love Jesus?
5. Which of the four Christian virtues from Ephesians 4:1-4 do you see as most actively present in our congregation?
6. The message listed various forces which tend to disrupt the unity of the Spirit. What forces seem most prevalent and powerful to you?
7. Do you see the unity of the local church as an issue in spiritual warfare? In your experience what has most often and what most seriously undermined or even destroyed that unity?
8. Does our church life give credible evidence that Jesus was sent from heaven?
9. In your experience what do people generally most object to regarding churches and church folk?
10. How could we as a church have a better testimony of the heavenly origin of Jesus?