

Out of Many, One: Unified Diversity Ephesians 4:7-16

INTRODUCTION

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 4:7-16.

Last week, we took a look at The Call to Unity (4:1-6). Who we are affects how we should act. This is the basic principle of life to which Paul appeals in our opening sentence of chapter 4. In the first three chapters he said, **“You are a child of God.”** Now in the fourth chapter, he is saying, **“Act like one.”** **Position dictates behavior.** Throughout the rest of this letter, he spells out for us in specific detail how we are to act.

Here’s Ephesians 4 in a nutshell: **Paul advises the Ephesian Christians (and you and me) to live the way God’s people should live. Two particularly important things should characterize your lives. First, since you are spiritually united in Christ with all other Christians, live in unity with one another. Minister to others and let others minister to you. In that way, you will all grow to spiritual maturity. Second, live holy lives. Put behind you the sins of the past and live a moral and ethical lifestyle that reflects the values of Christ.**

For this morning, we turn our attention to the **cultivation of unity.** Yes, we are one! However, unity is not uniformity! The fact that we are all one does not mean that we are all the same! **The cultivation of unity is made possible through a unified diversity that leads to spiritual maturity.** There’s a unified diversity in the church that fosters spiritual growth. God has spiritually gifted each one of us, so we should minister to one another which leads to spiritual maturity.

Believers are intended to perform two kinds of ministry. One is a missionary ministry to the world: They are to make disciples of all the nations. The other is an edifying ministry within the body of Christ: Each member is to do his part in the building up of that body until it attains “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

This section of Ephesians 4 helps us understand our responsibility to one another. Church growth...how do we achieve it?

I. _____ for church growth: the _____ of God (4:7-11)

Please note two groups of people addressed in these verses.

A. Grace-gifted _____ (4:7-10)

“Grace” here means the ability to perform the task God has called us to. **There is diversity within the unity of the church.** God has so constructed the church that all the various individuals within it are to complement one another so that the whole thing is built up and matures.

In these verses several matters of considerable importance are taught concerning spiritual gifts:

- Every Christian has a _____ of some kind.
- There is wide _____ in these gifts.
- The special grace (gift) that each Christian has is _____ “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (v. 7).

Paul goes on to say in verses 8–10 that not only do we each have a special grace, but our individual graces have a spectacular origin: (reread verses). In verses 8–10, Paul digresses from his direct argument to provide scriptural proof.

Here Paul borrows a line from Psalm 68:18. In verse 7 of that psalm God is pictured as marching in triumph before all Israel after the Exodus. When he comes to Sinai, the earth shakes under His feet (v. 8). Then in verses 11–14 kings and armies are described as fleeing before Him while His people sleep peacefully before their fires. Finally, in verses 16-17, from Mt. Sinai God sets His sight on Mt. Zion and moves with **“twice ten thousand; thousands of thousands”** of chariots up the slopes of Jerusalem in victory, leading captives in his train and receiving gifts from men (v. 18).

Paul is simply borrowing the imagery of Psalm 68 and applying it to Christ’s **incarnation and ascension**. The fact that he **“ascended”** implies that he **descended** in the Incarnation to the **“lower, earthly regions,”** which is another way of indicating the humiliation of coming to earth (cf. John 3:13). His descent to earth meant that He set aside the independent exercise of His attributes (such as His omnipresence), submitting the exercise of them to the Father’s will, and went down, down, down in the Incarnation, and then went even further down in his death, actually becoming sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). But then He burst up in exaltation — so that now He fills the whole universe as a conquering King and joyously lavishes gifts upon his children. He bestows abundant gifts to his Church and gives his people power to fulfill their gifts.

Not only does the Lord grant special gifts to the individual Christian, but He also grants **special gifted Christians as gifts to His church**. We meet them in Ephesians 4:11.

B. Grace-gifted _____ (4:11)

1. _____

2. _____

II. The _____ for church growth: _____ (4:12a)

The Biblical model is the Body of Christ in which those in pastoral (leadership) roles prepare God’s people for works of ministry. In our context, we call pastors ministers but every member of the body of Christ is a minister. The church is to practice every-member ministry.

On the ship of the church, there are no passengers. All are members of the crew who share the work of ministry. The **work of ministry** is broad enough to include how we serve one another in the body, how we serve our community, and how we take the gospel to the ends of the earth. It includes all that we do as redeemed people that glorifies Christ and obeys His commands for the church. It includes the exercise of our spiritual gifts in service to one another in the body. In other words, ministry is about the church in action. The ministry belongs to the church, not to the pastors or leaders.

III. The _____ of church growth: _____

(4:12b-16)

A. The goal _____ (4:12b-14)

Diverse gifts create and build up one body in unity. **The idea is not mainly that of individual believers attaining to perfection but rather that of the church, made up of the whole body of believers and viewed as a single organism, reaching its full spiritual stature.**

B. The goal _____ (4:15-16)

“Speaking the truth” translates a single [Greek] word that has been interpreted in many ways: holding truth, maintaining truth, living the truth, or speaking truth. It may be that we should understand the word as including all of these meanings. At any rate, the emphasis falls on the words **“in love.”** Even truth can be held and dispensed in a deceitful spirit; and even if deceit is not present, mere doctrinal orthodoxy can be a very cold and lifeless thing.

The phrase, **“speaking the truth,”** could be literally translated as **truthing**. It also conveys holding to the truth or dealing truly. Now, **truthing** is not a word in our language but the emphasis seems to be on living in, acting in, and speaking the truth in love toward one another. **We could simply think of it as acting with integrity toward one another.** That’s certainly true but the context calls for more. **It’s each member of the body intentionally speaking the gospel into one another’s lives.**

So, it’s not just pastors and teachers speaking the truth in love but it’s the responsibility of each one in the body. **We’re to so grow in Christ, be so committed to maturing in our understanding and application of God’s Word, and so concerned for one another, that we regularly speak the truth in love to one another.** That doesn’t mean that we major

on bossiness or attempting to make someone in our image or intruding into every situation or trying to control someone through our talk because we think that we’ve arrived spiritually.

When we speak the truth in love, we’re majoring on gospel truth and gospel application toward our brothers and sisters in the body. That means our concern will be **to build others up in the faith.** It implies that we’re **encouraging through the truth in Christ so that our brothers and sisters will press on faithfully in the Christian life.** We know that we only grow by truth, and we’re motivated to grow by truth, so we engage in **truthing** one another.

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? **Question: When you think of the church, what image comes to mind?** It’s an important question because our expectations will shape our experience.

This is what I want you to take home with you - if you hear nothing else, I want you to hear **this: The church is a community in which you’re equipped to help the church become what it should be.**