

The Unity of the Body – Part 4

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. well ... here we are again ... six months later, and already repeating a passage
2. the **importance** of unity for the church
 - a. Paul gives to the Ephesians his first great **imperative**: walk worthy of your calling
 1. the *effectual* call and the *continuing* call
 - b. Paul considered church unity to be a central matter of concern:
 1. firstly, built on a people walking in a form of **piety**: humility, patience, and love
 2. secondly, built on a people knit together **organically** as they serve one another
 - a. the gifting by the King of each member of the body (whom he has conquered)
 - b. to endow specific spiritual abilities upon each member so that they serve organically, not as “cogs in a machine,” but as a body with intertwined and interdependent parts
 3. thirdly (**now**), built on a people wrapped in a **doctrinal** covering
 - a. this spiritual gifting and organic service leads to an ever-increasing understanding of truth, which produces within the body a **spiritual maturity**
 - c. **Paul believes (ultimately) that the unity of the church is created doctrinally – that the body has been given (certain) spiritual gifts specifically designed to create a layer of “protection” that holds the church’s organic unity together around the central truths of the faith**

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

Content

a. the nature of the four functions given to the body (v. 11)

1. functions = specific actions designed for the establishment of and continuing preservation of the local church; *spiritual gifts* through which the local church flourishes
 - a. these are **not offices** – the offices of the church are *specific established leadership positions* which are defined elsewhere (e.g. **Acts 6**, **1 Timothy 3**, **Titus 1**)
 - b. the N.T. speaks of two (2) specific offices in the church (**neither is used in v. 11**)
 1. elders (“*bishop*” or “*overseer*” KJV) = the spiritual shepherds of the church (a plurality)
 2. deacons – the physical (or practical) managers of the church (under the elders)
2. Paul speaks here of four **gifts** (as functions) given by Christ to the church (not **five**)
 - a. **apostles** = men called out specifically by Christ to establish the church in word and structure
 1. a gift that ended with the original 13 because the call was unique and specific
 - b. **prophets** = men gifted to speak a revelatory word from God in the establishment of the church
 1. a gift that “ended” in the specific sense with the full canon of Scripture – it “continues” within the role of the evangelist and shepherd only insofar as a word from the Word is given
 - c. **evangelists** = men uniquely gifted to proclaim the gospel and call people to faith in Christ
 1. a gift that was essential in the First Century, but was never to be treated as a “professional” position with the church – it “continues” within the proclamation of Scripture (**2 Tim. 4:5**)
 - d. **shepherd-teachers** = men gifted to guide the body spiritually, to use **teaching** as a means to produce spiritual growth and maturity in the lives of believers
 1. there is no reference to the office of “pastor” – that is a Latin variation of “shepherd” (*poimen*)
 2. there is **no definite article** in the Greek (i.e. “*the*” or “*some*” KJV) before “*teacher*”
 3. therefore, the fourth function is *probably* intended by Paul to be “*shepherd-teacher*”

b. the purpose of the four functions given to the body (vv. 12-13)

1. the four functions are primarily designed for **understanding** (i.e. the effect over the mind)
 - a. **IOW:** these deal with the *objective* realities of the body, rather than the *subjective* (or emotional)
 1. **note:** there are *other* gifts given for dealing with emotional and physical needs (e.g. helps)
 2. **note:** for many American evangelicals, teachers teach, but pastors *do not* – the assumption is that pastors (primarily) provide comfort and emotional support (e.g. **Tommy Pickering**)
 3. but, consider the analogy of a shepherd: the shepherd's *primary* responsibility is to make sure that the sheep are properly fed and watered, rather than given "kind words"
2. to "equip the saints" = to impart to the saints the *equipment* they will need (v. 12a)
 - a. possibly an early allusion to **Eph. 6:10-20**: the whole "armor of God"
 1. a **soldier analogy** – a picture of a soldier standing against an attacking enemy force
 - a. an armor that is designed to stand against the schemes of the devil (linked to v. 14)
 2. an armor that begins with a "belt of truth" (6:14) – the starting place of the Christian faith
 - a. genuine, biblical Christianity is built upon the rock-solid foundation of objective truth
 - b. **contra** the belief that learning theology and doctrine is "optional" to the Christian experience
 - b. **the work of the shepherd-teacher is to equip every believer with a thorough understanding of doctrine and theology – to give every believer a solid foundation and equipping**
 1. **doctrine and theology are personal** – the study of God → a sense of objective truth
3. for "the work of ministry" = to move the saints to do the work of the Spirit (v. 12b)
 - a. "ministry" (*diakonia*; root of *deacon*) = service; help; support; contribution; lit. to wait upon others
 1. a **body analogy** – a picture of the church as the various parts of a body (1 Cor. 12:12)
"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."
 - a. an organic unity whereby all are working together to advance the cause of Christ
 - b. **the work of the shepherd-teacher is to expand the vision of the nature and goals of the church in the eyes of believers by connecting theology to practice (from machine to body)**
 1. **doctrine and theology are practical** – the study of God → an organism with others
4. for "building up the body" = to develop the saints into a cohesive structure (v. 12c)
 - a. "building up" = constructing; increasing; strengthening; growing; lit. building something **concrete**
 1. a **construction analogy** (a similar word for architecture) – the brick-by-brick work of making believers into a cohesive unit working towards a common set of goals
 2. **note:** the contrast between calling-passion-desire versus skill-ability
 - a. i.e. the belief that a spiritual gift (or place of service) is primarily a matter of skill-ability
 1. e.g. the "rotation" method of service, which leads to burn-out and unrealized expectations
 2. there are some clues in Paul's listings of spiritual gifts that he considered calling-passion-desire the most significant aspect of how to determine *where* to serve
 1. e.g. in both 1 Cor. 12 and Romans 12:4-8, he follows the list with a discussion of "love"
 2. e.g. in Romans 12:8, he specifically speaks of doing these things with "zeal"
 - b. there are some clues in Paul's listings of spiritual gifts that he considered calling-passion-desire the most significant aspect of how to determine *where* to serve
 1. e.g. in both 1 Cor. 12 and Romans 12:4-8, he follows the list with a discussion of "love"
 2. e.g. in Romans 12:8, he specifically speaks of doing these things with "zeal"
 - b. **the work of the shepherd-teacher is to fan the passion and desire of every believer into seeking the best place to serve within the body as he or she applies the study of theology and doctrine to the realities of church-life**
 1. **doctrine and theology are passionate** – the study of God → a passion to serve him
5. until we "attain to the unity ..." = to unify the saints around a common set of characteristics (v. 13)
 - a. of "the faith" = a unity of **radical trust** in Jesus Christ (living by faith)
 - b. of "the knowledge of the Son of God" = a unity of **understanding** of who Jesus Christ really is
 - c. to "mature manhood" = a **maturity** where belief and practice are rightly combined
 - d. to "the stature of the fullness of Christ" = a **conformity** to the image of Christ in everything
 - e. i.e. understanding (doctrine) → faith (trust) → maturity (consistency) → conformity (holiness)
 - f. **the work of the shepherd-teacher is to drive every believer to maturity, to insist on every follower of Christ knowing and applying the doctrines of the faith to every aspect of life**
 1. **doctrine and theology are paramount** – the study of God → holy lives and service
6. Paul considered church unity to start with personal piety, to produce an organic whole where all are using their spiritual gifts as a part of a body, and to be covered by a strong sense of doctrinal and theological understanding and maturity