

The Unity of the Body – Part 6

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 **body analogy** of unity for the church
 - a. the individual organs as believers, walking in a form of **piety**: humility, patience, and love
 - b. 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
 - c. the body held together by a **doctrinal unity**, a “flesh” that wraps the body, protecting it and holding it together; giving the body a cohesiveness within which everything else happens
 1. through the “**gifts**” of various teachers given by Christ to the church to:
 2. 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, **and ...**
 3. protecting them against various forms of **heresy** (i.e. winds and waves of doctrine, human cunning, religious and philosophical schemes, tradition, etc.) with the lurking potential for **apostasy**, both of which can be spiritually **fatal** to the believer
 - d. the **final aspect** of this body analogy = the **center** of unity for the church, the **ultimate** source and focus of all unity in the church – where it all comes together and has its **goal**

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

Content

d. the goal of the four functions given to the body (vv. 15-16)

1. “speaking the truth in love” = the **means** by which our ultimate unity is gained
 - a. **question**: who is Paul referring to as those who are to “speak” the truth?
 1. possibly: the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers of **v. 11**
 - a. **i.e.** that these roles speak truth by virtue of their nature as leaders
 - b. clearly, “speaking the truth” refers to the process by which these “gifts” are given to the body – as a means by which truth is transferred and grounded in the church
 - c. obviously, Paul would assume that teachers speak **only** truth into the lives of their people
 1. it is the central aim of being a teacher within the church (**1 Tim. 1:3-6**)

“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”
 2. it is why teachers are held to a higher accountability than others (**James 3:1**)

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”
 3. it is because a lack of truth is what **leads** to heresy and apostasy (**Heb. 5:12-14**)

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”
 - a. it is a lack of doctrinal maturity that leads to the apostasy warning of **Hebrews 6**
 2. probably: the entirety of the church body
 - a. **i.e.** the “we” indicates that the entirety of the church body (under the direction of the teachers) is to speak forth truth in the entirety of our existence – Paul assumes that the work of the teachers will lead to a state in which the whole body is in truth (**note v. 14**)

- b. **note:** the “seeming” contradiction between “speaking the truth” and “love”
1. how, in our (every?) culture, the sense in which actually telling someone the truth is considered to be bigoted or phobic or racist *against their prevailing desires* (unloving)
 2. how, in every culture, the sense in which speaking the truth of the gospel (**i.e.** that men are dead in their sins and under the righteous judgment of God, but faith in Jesus is the only source of righteousness) will always be offensive (**John 6:56-57; 60-61**)
“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me” ... When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this?”
 3. **principle: it is because the world has always hated the truth of God that the church is charged with being the instrument of truth in the world (i.e. to be relevant)**
- b. so, what does it mean for Christians to “speak the truth?”
1. **in the world:** to actually articulate the truths of the gospel (rather than just using a form of “lifestyle evangelism” or professionalism or mutism)
 2. **in the church:** to make truth permeate every aspect of our communal lives
 - a. confessing sin to and repenting before one another (**James 5:16; Luke 17:3-4**)
“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”
 - b. holding one another accountable to sound doctrine (**Hebrews 10:23-25**)
“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
 3. encouraging in concrete (not emotional) forms of hope (**1 Thess. 5:12-14**)
“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you [as elders], and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle [undisciplined], encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”
 - a. **e.g.** note how Paul starts this letter with a discussion of the *Divine Decree*
 2. “we are to grow up” = the **reason** for which our ultimate unity must exist
 - a. Paul is convinced that Christians must mature in their faith (**see v. 13b**)
 1. the danger here is to misunderstand the interplay between *simple saving faith* (**Rom. 10:10ff**) and *intellectual understanding* (particularly as adherents of Reformed Theology)
 - a. **mistake #1:** to assume that simple saving faith is all that God requires of us in our salvation
 - b. **mistake #2:** to assume that faith is only how well we understand certain doctrines
 2. **principle: while simple trust in the completed work of Christ is all that is necessary to enter paradise (e.g. the thief), it is assumed that our faith must grow in coming to understand the deeper things of God, thereby finding greater assurance in that faith**
 - a. God loves you just the way you are, but he loves you *too much* to leave you as you are!
 - b. Paul will launch into a lengthy diatribe in **vv. 17-32** about what growing up *looks like* in daily life
 3. “into him who is the head” = the **person** to which our ultimate unity is unto
 - a. Paul finishes his body analogy – the organic unity of the individual members, held together by the outward flesh of doctrine, is *headed* by Christ – the head of the body is Jesus, and it is the *head* that gives the body its *ultimate* purpose and unity
 1. **i.e.** the head as the *primary* member of the body, where the mind (brain) orders, regulates, and maintains all of the other functions below it (**see Eph. 1:22-23**)
 - b. Paul sees the unity of the body to be a *central focus* upon the headship of Jesus Christ
 1. **e.g.** in *Christless Christianity*, Michael Horton diagnoses the church as “trivial, sentimental, affirming, and irrelevant,” having a gospel of personal happiness *but without Jesus Christ*
 - a. **IOW:** it’s possible to go to a church for many years, and *never* hear the gospel nor any focus upon Jesus Christ as the *center* of the institution or the lives of its members
 - c. **principle: the church is all about Jesus Christ – it’s all about his Lordship over every aspect of our individual and communal lives – it’s all about him!**
 1. **not:** WWJD or “I just want to love Jesus” or Jesus as our “golden ticket” or “great example”
 2. **rather:** the **supremacy** of Jesus Christ in all things (Piper) – we worship him, we pray to him and through him, we serve him, we obey him, we adore him, we speak for him, we seek to understand him, we teach our children of him, we see the world through him, we long to be with him, we know him (**Luke 6:46-48a**)
“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock ...”
 - d. **principle: our unity is ultimately around Jesus Christ – the true unity of the church is found in every believer being focused on Christ rather than on themselves**
 1. **e.g.** the illustration of tuning a dozen pianos in a circle

4. “from whom ... so that it builds itself up” = the **goal** of our ultimate unity
 - a. “builds itself up” = a combination of *internal* and *external* growth
 1. (obviously) in this context, the building up of believers into fully devoted followers of Christ
 2. also, the building up of the church as it expands itself by gospel reproduction
 - b. **application: our unity in the headship of Christ (individually, organically, doctrinally) is the basis of the advancement of the cause of Christ in the world – we are called to be a united body so that Christ’s gospel finds the elect through us and brings them to faith**