

**15.04.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.**

***Two Ages: One Church***

Bible Readings = Eph. 4:1-6 and 1 Cor. 12:1-13

**Introduction:**

- (1) Last Sunday, we considered the reality of the resurrection life of Christ: not simply *that* he rose again but *why* he rose again. He died for sin, once and for all, never to die again. The life he lives, he lives to God. The amazing truth is that we have both died with him and been raised with him, so that the life he lives to God is the life in which we are to share.
- (2) The things about which we spoke last weekend (both on Good Friday and Easter Sunday) are intimately related to the series we are doing on Ephesians.
- (3) We have a position in Christ on which we are called to reckon, and from which we are called to live.

***This week we continue with our series from Ephesians, and we will be considering the great unities in which the people of God exist. It is important to see that we are called to work from these, rather than seeking to work towards them.***

**1. Recognising the Times in Which We Live**

(1) In 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul speaks of the Church as those on whom ‘the *ends* of the ages have come’.

- The plural is unusual, and in some translations it is simply put as ‘the end of the ages’, but in a number of translations the plural is maintained.
  - Probably the best way of understanding this is that we live in the overlapping of two ages. The current evil age (which is passing away), and the age to come (of which we have already received the first fruits).  
The old is not yet fully gone, and the new is not yet fully come.

(2) This pattern is seen throughout the New Testament: we are at the same time *in* Christ, without ever the possibility of recall, but we are not yet *out of* the world.

- John 17:9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours John 17:14 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 John 17:16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world And then see John 17:15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one
- In like manner, we are already in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, blessed with all spiritual blessings in him, but yet are in the contested situation in which all that we are and all we will be is opposed.

(3) We need to recognise the times in which we live, because we can fall into two opposite problems unless we do:

- On the one hand, if we do not realise that this age is *passing away*, will think that this age is all there is. We become wedded to this age and the things of this age, and look at everything through the spectacles that this age provides us (e.g. in relation to success, achievement, self esteem, etc.)

- On the other hand, unless we recognise that the age to come is just that: the age *to come*, we will be most disappointed when things in *this* age do not match up to the perfection of *that* age.
  - We become disillusioned if we find that we and others still need grace, if there is still sickness, grief, failure, and sin in ourselves and others. ‘Disillusioned’ must mean we have had an ‘illusion’ to begin with! (GCB)

## 2. The Manifold Unity of the Church

(1) In the passage we have before us, together with the parallel reading in 1 Corinthians 12, we are shown that the church of God is in fact one, but that that oneness comes through to us in manifold ways.

(2) In Eph. 4:3 and 4:13 Paul uses a word that appears only here in the New Testament. Usually translated ‘unity’, but could perhaps be spoken of as ‘oneness’.

- If there is a difference of meaning it is in the bringing together of diverse things into ‘oneness’, rather than just uniformity of all things.

(3) In Eph. 4:4-6 there are three sets of statements:

- Body, Spirit, hope of calling in Eph. 4:4
- Lord, faith, baptism in Eph. 4:5
- Father, over all and in all and through all in Eph. 4:6

(4) Each person of the Trinity is shown in relation to their particular gift, action and status. We are given the ‘oneness’ in and through the whole Godhead:

- In the ministry of the Spirit we are brought into the body of Christ. He brings to us the gifts of new birth, faith, repentance etc., so that we can see that we have been crucified with Christ, and raised with him to new life. Through him, Christ the head of the body, spreads his gifts through his members. Through him we have the love of God shed abroad, which confirms us in our hope...he is the Spirit who cries Abba Father...and our hope lies in the full revelation of our being and identity as sons of God (as in Rom. 8)
- In the ministry of the Son (the Lord, Jesus Messiah) we are brought into oneness. We have one faith (in him) and we have been baptised into his body by the Spirit. Book of Acts commonly indicates people were baptised in the name of Jesus. But the baptism is more than just the event of being washed with water...it is a baptism into all that the Lord is and has done for us. In being baptised into Christ we have clothed ourselves with Christ.
- But the ministries of the Spirit and the Son have been ordered and ordained by the Father, who has sent the Son into the world, and through the risen Jesus who has poured out the Holy Spirit into our hearts. He is over all, in all, through all. There is great practical assurance in this, as well as eternal security...compare with Romans 8:28-39.

(5) Paul will go on to show how the unity is being given every support and blessing necessary for it to be preserved.

- Eph. 4:7ff. and the various ministry gifts (more next time)
- But see the goal of it all: Eph. 4:14-17 and see this in relation to Eph. 3:14ff.

### 3. We Live In the Oneness

(1) In all this we must recognise that the oneness is God's gift, in which we *already live*.

- We live *out of the oneness*, not in order to create it. How does this happen? Paul tells us in the remaining chapters.
  - Some of the elements:
    - § the gospel that the church lives in (through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers)...and note the importance of *the* faith (Eph. 4:13) i.e. the grace of God in the gospel compared with what is not really a gospel (as in the Galatian scene)...oneness in the gospel, deeds of the flesh come through the other;
    - § the putting off of things that belong to our old existence and putting on the renewed spirit of the mind of Christ;
    - § the laying aside of anger and not giving the devil an opportunity;
    - § forgiving as we have been forgiven, not grieving the Holy Spirit;
    - § being filled with the Spirit;
    - § being subject to one another;
    - § and so on!

(2) But to remind us of what was said earlier: we must recognise the times in which we live:

- If we try to make this world our home, and this current age the place of our fulfilment, we will be reduced to using the means and tools of this age, and will find that our love, joy, peace etc. is dissipated.
- If we demand perfectionism from ourselves and one another in these things it will likewise dissipate all the fruit of the Spirit, as we will then be forced to relate to ourselves and one another on the basis of our performance...and we will find that the Law says 'do this and it is never done'...rather 'grace says, "Believe this" and all is already done' (Luther).