

EPHESIANS 4:1-16

THE CHURCH IN ITS UNITY, DIVERSITY AND MATURITY

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SESSION 6 - CHRISTIAN MATURITY (Ephesians 4:12-16)

INTRODUCTION

This section leads us into the heights of Paul's view of the potential and destiny of the Church. It also shows the ultimate purpose and goal of the ministries described in the previous study.

I. THE PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S GIFTS

These gifts of the ascended Christ are to equip God's people.

- Stott "Here is incontrovertible evidence that the New Testament envisages ministry not as the prerogative of a clerical elite but as the privileged calling of all the people of God."
- Stott "The New Testament concept of the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all initiatives, but of one who helps and encourages all God's people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts... Thus, instead of monopolising all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministries.

"...The New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock but both a plural oversight and an every member ministry."

The goal is to equip saints with varied ministries with the ultimate purpose of building up the body.

- equip - range of meanings includes "to complete", "to restore" and "to prepare". Used in connection with e.g. fishermen mending nets. (Mt 4:21)
- Ministers are not only to prepare sermons but prepare people, i.e. make disciples, communicating not only information, but gifting and skills.
- Lincoln "All believers are to be brought to a state of completion, and it is the ministers Christ has given who are the means to this

end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching and leadership."

Ephesians 4 gifted people are to model a serving style so that "ministry" is understood to be a work of service (e.g. 1 Cor 16:15 where Stephanas and his household are said to have devoted themselves to the *service of the saints*).

We must avoid the self-important attitude of finding 'my ministry' - i.e. how can I shine, how can I be fulfilled? - Jesus was among us as one who served and washed feet as an example that we should do as he did.

Our purpose is to build up the body of Christ.

II. THE MAGNIFICENT GOAL OF A MATURE, UNITED BODY (v13-16)

A threefold goal.

(1) Unity of the faith

V5 sees "one faith" as given, but we are still to move on to appropriate it

- Lincoln "The idea is of the whole church moving toward the appropriation of all that is contained in its one faith."

Notice that 'we all' compares with Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:18 where he stresses that we are 'able to comprehend *with all the saints*' the wonders of Christ's love. These are things that we accomplish together in the body.

- In contrast to being tossed about by waves of doctrine. (v14)
- (see Col 1:23, 2:7)

(2) Unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.

- i.e. appropriating together all that is involved in the salvation we have obtained in Christ, as Paul prayed earlier in the epistle.

- Leon Morris "...not simply the promotion of orthodoxy but the bringing of people to know Christ. The linking of "the faith" and "the knowledge of the Son of God" indicates that it is the relationship of believers to the Son of God that is at the heart of it all."
- Lincoln "Attaining to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God is likely to mean appropriating all that is involved in the

salvation which centres in Christ...Earlier in his two intercessory prayers he has spelt out a number of aspects of this one knowledge that he desires his readers to possess. (1:17-19, 3:16-19). In the earlier passages such knowledge was regarded primarily as a gift to be received, but now it is also viewed as a goal to be reached."

(3) To a mature man

The "one new man" (2:15) is to attain mature manhood which is nothing less than the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (cf Eph 3:19 - that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God)

Paul is speaking of a corporate maturity, not mature individuals, though of course individual maturity is crucial. (cf Col 1:28)

Paul contrasts maturity with childishness.

- Lincoln "Not only do silly infants contrast with the mature adult, but the plural of "children" also contrasts with "the mature person", individualism being a sign of childishness, unity a sign of maturity."

(4) Not vulnerable to false teaching.

"Tossed by the waves."

- Lincoln "Immaturity is evidenced in instability, rootlessness, lack of direction and susceptibility to manipulation and error."

False teachers were present in Paul's day and are in ours.

- Lincoln "In the context of 4:7-16 this negative picture of verse 14 is meant to underline the importance of Christ's giving of ministers to the Church. Immaturity on the part of believers cannot be treated as a neutral state which will be outgrown in due course. It is a highly dangerous condition because it lays them open to manipulation by cunning people and the forces of error. But it is for precisely such a situation that pastors and teachers have been provided - to prevent believers in their immaturity from falling prey to false teaching and to lead them from the instability which ends in error to the stability of the truth."

(5) Speaking the truth in love we grow

The truth of the gospel must be brought to bear against error.

We are not called simply to be activists. We must see the vital place of truth and doctrine.

Later Paul will insist that we stand in the evil day by first 'having fastened on the belt of truth' (Eph 6:14 ESV).

- Stott "Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth."

Truth must be the basis of our growth together, but without love truth can be wounding. (Peter used his sword to cut off a man's ear. Many use their "sword" in a similar way.)

James 3:17. The wisdom from above...peaceable, gentle, reasonable (margin - "willing to yield")...(yet also) unwavering.

(6) Christ as the head

Already said that he is head over all things; now explicitly he is the head of the Church.

Col 2:19 "...holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." (ESV)

- Lincoln "Through the proper functioning of the parts, the whole body is to be active in promoting its own growth, although ultimately it is Christ who is seen as providing the means for the body to carry out such activity...As the one who has been exalted to sovereign rule over all things, Christ is in the position and has the power to supply his church with the leadership, the life, and the love that are the requisites for its growth."

(7) Fitted and held together by joints of supply

Each ligament is seen as a means of support or supply for the other parts of the body.

- Lincoln "...the ligaments providing connections and mediating life and energising power throughout the body."

The life of Christ is flowing in a 'joined up body' causing growth, 'so that it builds itself up in love.' (ESV)

- Lloyd Jones "The Apostle teaches that, if the whole body is to grow and to develop and to build itself up in love, then it is very important

that every particular part should be filled up to its capacity with this vital life and energy, and be functioning as it's designed to do. It is not surprising that the Apostle piled term upon term. He was concerned to show the glory of the Church and the glory of our position as individual members of the Church."

(8) Each member working properly.

Our goal is a multi-functioning body. When any member fails to work properly the body is influenced negatively.

- Lincoln
"The Church is not a chance collection of individuals; it has a unity already given by God's Spirit, and the top priority on its agenda must be to preserve this. But at the same time this unity is not a monochrome uniformity; the variety in Christ's distribution of grace to all ensures its rich diversity.

"Love is the energising power behind the community's drive to maintain unity, at the heart of its proclamation of truth and all the way through its process of corporate growth."
- Stott
"If the 16th Century recovered 'the priesthood of all believers' (every Christian enjoying through Christ a direct access to God), perhaps the 20th Century will recover 'the ministry of all believers' (every Christian receiving from Christ a privileged ministry to men)."

We must be on our guard against anything that promotes passivity in the church. The saints do not gather to be entertained but to be built up and equipped for service.

- Piper
"According to the New Testament, 'ministry' is what all Christians do. Pastors have the job of equipping the saints for the work of ministry. But ordinary Christians *do* the ministry. What ministry looks like is as varied as Christians are varied. It's not an office; it's a lifestyle devoted to advancing other people's faith and holiness. In this sense the only life that counts for anything is a life of ministry.

"Fulfilling your ministry is more important than staying alive. 'I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the *ministry* which I received from the Lord Jesus' (Acts 20:24). Doing the ministry that God gives us to do is more important than life. You may think you need to save your life in order to do your ministry. On the contrary, how you lose your life may be the capstone of your ministry."

CONCLUSION

- Lincoln

"The focus of the passage is on the church's inner growth rather than on its mission, but the quality of its corporate life has everything to do with the church's fulfilling its role in the world...Christ's ascension far above all the heavens was in order that he might fill the cosmos with his sovereign rule and his work in his church is part of the carrying out of that rule."