

Living as God's Glory

Wk 4 (11/2) Handout – Ephesians 4:1-16 “Unity Via the Spirit

Summary

In Chapter 1, Paul celebrates the glory of God who set aside for himself a people to declare his glory and called them to be holy. He forgave their sins, adopted them as sons and daughters, and indwelt them with power. These set aside people form the church, Christ's body, who continue the flesh and blood revelation of God to all humanity and to the universe. They are empowered by his Spirit and seated beside Christ in heaven while they live out their mortal lives on earth. In a sense, you can say that God's people are like Christ who is fully human and fully divine. We are fully human while also fully sons and daughters of God.

In Chapter 2, Paul highlights how God's efforts for salvation are demonstrated in bringing both Jews and Gentiles together to form “one new humanity.” This unity is the work of the power of God and the Holy Spirit. In Chapter 3, Paul depicts himself as a minister of this unifying message of God's grace and prays that the Ephesians will begin to grasp the love of God for them, the power at work in them and begin to live with faithful imagination.

(4:1-16) Unity via the Spirit

In this section, Paul's focus shifts from theology to practice. He opens the section calling on the Ephesians to “live a life worthy” of the gospel. Paul has spent three chapters describing the glorious work of God and praying that the Ephesians would “grasp” the magnitude of what God has done. Paul essentially says....if you get the picture of what God has done....your response should be to live a life worthy of the calling. The life Paul calls for is a life unity, unity accomplished by the Spirit in Christ, but maintained by the church. The unity of God is not the work of Christians; it is what God has already accomplished in Christ. All that remains is to “keep the unity.” To highlight the perfect nature of the unity God has created Paul uses seven “ones” – one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, Father. Given the context of chapter 2, these seven “ones” makes it clear that there will not be a Jewish-Christian body and a Gentile-Christian body, there will only be one-body.

After emphasizing the unity of the body, Paul nuances the idea of unity describing the distribution and variation of gifts within the church. The particular gifts that each person shares within the body originate with Christ. In particular the “teaching” roles of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” serve the body by preparing the body to do good works and avoid false teaching.

Discussion

- In 4:1, Paul asks the Ephesians to “live a life worthy of their calling.” Read through this section and list all of the indicators that describe the kind of people Paul is “calling” us to be?
- How are the character traits listed in 4:2 linked to the preservation of unity mentioned in 4:3?
- Why might Paul need to emphasize that Christ is the source of gifts and roles in the body?
- In what ways can our various “gifts” be understood as personalized grace? What is the connection between grace and gifts?

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- Look at (4:11-13). How does this verse depict the organization and functioning of the body?
- As you read this section, what would you say is “job #1” of the church as a whole? Of each individual within the church?
- What are the things that threaten the body or the unity of the body implied by this section?
- Read 1 Cor 1-3; 1 Thess 2:1-6; Rom 16:17-18; Gal 1-2. What similarities do you see between these passages and this section in Ephesians? How do these passages clarify what “speak the truth in love” might mean? What is the central truth of the Gospel message Paul had to defend?
- What will growth look like within the body of Christ according to this section?

PM Discussion

This section in Ephesians uses words such as “prepare,” “built up,” “reach,” “become mature,” “attaining,” “grow up,” “grow,” “build itself up.” This is the language of progress in the faith and growing in our walk with Christ. For the discussion Sunday night I want to have each of us respond to these three questions.

1. If your faith-life or the maturity of your discipleship was measured in years similar to how we measure a persons life. How old are you in your faith-maturity?
2. This section talks about each of us having a “work” and “gifts of grace.” What do you consider to be your “gifts of grace” or your “work” for the kingdom?
3. If you could do one thing this week that would help the body of Christ be “built up,” what would it be?