

The Maturity of Unity

REVIEW: We are in the book of Ephesians. It is an excellent book about how God has called us, and gathered us together in as one church. The first few chapters have been about God's amazing blessings to us (particularly as Gentiles). We used to be like everyone else, chasing after the god of this world and the things he uses to entice us. But then God stepped in and made us alive in Christ, and reconciled us to Himself and as Jews and Gentiles.

Last week we looked at Paul's wonderful prayer for our strengthening in the Spirit and to have Christ alive in our hearts and to understand Christ's love that is beyond understanding. It is an amazing prayer!

TRAN: Today we turn a corner in the book. Much like other letters of Paul's (Romans for example) the first part of the letter is focused on theology, the second part on practical life. Ephesians does the same. Granted, Ephesians theology is intertwined with descriptions of the life of the Ephesians, and prayers of Paul, but it is highly theological to be sure. Today we head into the practical part of the book, and this is where it gets even better. I say that because the practical parts are drawn directly from the theological parts.

Ephesians 4:1-16

- I. Live a life worthy of the calling - v.1
 - A. I think upon deeper study in the book of Ephesians verse 1 has become my favorite verse!
 1. The reason is not so much that I walk away from the verse with the warm fuzzies like other verse might provide
 2. It is because it ties theology and practical life together in such a way that reminds us of our call, and how that call changes EVERYTHING about us
 - B. Paul reminds them of his status that he is a prisoner for Jesus Christ because of the call on his life
 1. In other words, when Paul challenges them about the call on their lives (which he is about to get to), he uses himself as an example of how far that call has pushed him in his life
 2. "God called me. I answered that call and it has meant imprisonment. And I am okay with that, because I know that I am following God's call."
 - C. "WALK worthy of the calling you have received."
 1. The question is: what calling?
 2. The answer is what he has been saying in the first three chapters, specifically back in chapter 1

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- a) You were called by God, chosen by Him before the world EVER came to be
- b) Some people still struggle with that idea, but to me that is a comfort
 - (1) God picked me
 - (2) Still have NO IDEA WHY, because I can treat Him like such an idiot sometimes, but God chose me
 - (3) And the very fact that He chose me, even though I am an idiot means that He must love me a lot
 - (4) Talk about a comfort
- 3. Consider chapter 2
 - a) You used to be DEAD in your sins
 - b) But you were made ALIVE in Christ
 - c) That is part of the call
 - d) You had nothing to offer, but God made you alive
- 4. Sadly we seem unimpressed with the salvation we have
 - a) We have a million dollar salvation, and a five cent response
 - b) We need to walk worthy of the call
- D. If you noticed something, I read that part of verse one differently than what you might have in your Bible
 - 1. That's because the literal translation is "walk worthy of the calling"
 - 2. I prefer the literal translation
 - a) Live is a passive word
 - (1) You can live and be very active, as in some people really know how to live
 - (2) But it can also be very passive, as if all you need to do is exist
 - b) With the word walk, it is active
 - (1) Walk means you are doing something
 - (2) Walk means that you aren't warming a pew with your butt, but you are actively seeking how to take what is said in here, and translate it out into the world out there
 - c) Walk worthy of being chosen before the foundation of the world
 - d) Walk worthy of having been made alive in Christ
 - e) WALK worthy
- E. Back to the theology idea for a minute
 - 1. How we live is always based on theology
 - a) When your theology is wrong, you will not be living correctly
 - 2. So obedience is always a response to grace
 - a) God acts, we respond to that grace
 - 3. So as we enter into a section that speaks of ethics between humans, keep this in mind

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- a) Rules will NEVER motivate ethical behavior
 - b) Awareness of God motivates ethical behavior
 - c) This is why I constantly tell you that you need to fall deeper in love with God
 - (1) When we understand Him
 - (2) When we understand what we are called from and what we are called to, it affects our behavior
 - (3) It is that awareness of God, that loving relationship with God that is our motivation
- II. But how does one walk worthy of the calling in this life? vv.2-13
- A. Paul starts out the how of walking worthy right away, and the how is all relational with others
- 1. Please understand that our theology gives us our ethics
 - a) For example, according to the Bible, all humans are created in the image of God
 - b) That means there is an automatic respect for all of human life
 - 2. But our theology goes deeper than that as well
 - a) We share our identity in Christ
 - b) We share the experience of having our sins forgiven and our lives cleansed by His death and resurrection
 - c) Because of this shared identity, we share a common set of values and virtues that God has set for us
 - 3. The first way of walking worthy, starting with verse 2, is “with all humility and gentleness” - the literal translation
 - a) Each of these ways of walking worthy comes with a manner of something we should rid ourselves of
 - (1) To have humility we must rid ourselves of self-centeredness
 - (2) We need to view ourselves properly
 - (a) Some take it too far that we are worms before God - which is true but not true because God has given us value
 - (b) But we are also not God
 - (3) We were created in God’s image (his moral, spiritual emotional image) and were created to be in relationship with Him
 - (4) The gospel is the perfect remedy for self-centeredness
 - (a) That call on our lives - that God chose us before creation
 - (b) That we were DEAD and He made us alive
 - (c) We were the passive ones, and God is the One that did all the work

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- (5) Do you see why I drive you back to the gospel over and over - it is the place that we live out of when we have a proper understanding of it
- b) To be gentle we have to rid ourselves of harshness and violence
 - (1) Gentleness carries the idea of being sensitive to others, valuing them, and nurturing them
 - (2) And while all of these virtues that helps us know how to walk worthy of our calling apply to all people, gentleness may be needed in our families more than any other place
 - (a) The world beats us up pretty bad - bosses that are a handful, crazed co-workers, difficult neighbors
 - (b) The last thing we need is to be beat up at home
 - (c) Home should be a safe place; a place of nurture and growth
 - (d) Parents, your kids should be labeled “FRAGILE: Handle with Care”
 - (e) Spouses: same thing - handle with care
- 4. The next manner of walking worthy is patience
 - a) To have patience we have to walk away from the “tyranny of the urgent agenda”
 - b) We all have a sense of timing when events should happen, and we usually don’t agree with other people’s timing
 - c) To be honest, impatience is just another form of self-centeredness
 - d) Patience gives people space and time to fail, learn, and grow
 - (1) We need patience in our daily schedule
 - (2) But we also need patience in allowing people to grow at their own rates
- 5. The next manner of walking worthy is bearing with one another in love
 - a) To achieve this we have to give up our “rights”
 - (1) I had never heard this saying before, but I like it (this may become one of my “crazy ol’ grandpa” sayings: “Be careful of standing on your rights, for then God may stand on His.”
 - (2) And rights - even though sometimes legit, can just be another form of self-centeredness
 - b) Love is a choice
 - (1) So we make the choice to put up with things that sometimes we might not like
 - (2) We talked about this a few weeks ago when we talked about the Christian’s response to many offenses in life - we absorb or overlook the offense

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- (3) Same idea - whatever is annoying us, we make a choice for it not to bother us because we love the other person
- 6. The last manner of walking worthy is in verse 3, “keep the unity of the Spirit”
 - a) Who achieved the unity, us, or God according to this verse?
 - (1) God achieved the unity
 - (2) It is the unity that comes from the Spirit (unity of the Spirit)
 - b) That is important for us to take note of
 - (1) We did not create this unity
 - (2) We are simply seeking to maintain it
 - (3) We received this unity from God with us being reconciled to God and to each other in Christ
- B. Then we go back to our theology of why maintaining unity is so important in vv. 4-6
 - 1. Paul gives us a series of “ones” that are the basis for our unity
 - 2. Verse four
 - a) One body - this is the church, the group that Christ has reconciled to Himself and to each other - both Jews and Gentiles
 - (1) Again, that Jew and Gentile thing means little to us
 - (2) But back then it was like the nation of Israel is today - the fighting between the Palestinians and the Jews
 - (3) It was something that was only an act of God to bring those groups together
 - (4) It is important to note that this is not talking about multiple “bodies of Christ” as in different churches in various locales
 - (5) It is referring to the universal church - those that are His
 - b) One Spirit - The one that brings the unity in the first place
 - (1) The body is together because of the Spirit’s work
 - c) One hope - the hope in Christ of salvation through His sacrifice on the cross
 - 3. Verse five
 - a) One Lord
 - b) One faith - in Christ
 - c) One baptism
 - (1) This one is not referring to mode or timing of how to get wet
 - (2) This is referring to the fact that we are baptized into Christ
 - (3) It is an extension of the “in Christ” theme in Ephesians
 - 4. Verse six
 - a) One God and Father of all
 - (1) This is an obvious reference

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- (2) But Paul is clear about His position - that He is over ALL
5. All of these “ones” are the basis for our unity
 - a) One faith in the same Savior
 - b) We were baptized into Christ
 - c) We serve One God
 - d) Of course we are unified
 - e) Again, our theology defines how we should behave
 - (1) One savior, faith and God
 - (2) We are all “in the same Christ”
 - (3) Therefore we are unified - so now we must do all we can to preserve that unity - which starts with those virtues of how to live out our calling
 - C. Paul now changes from unity to diversity - vv. 7-13
 1. I think Paul never wants us to think that unity means we are all the same
 - a) NOT the definition of unity folks
 - b) Unity is about all of us being about the mission of God
 - c) That whole one mind thing - having the mind of Christ
 2. He starts by telling us that each of us have been given grace by God as Christ has given it out
 - a) The word for grace here is not the same as the word we usually see as gift when referring to spiritual gifts
 - (1) So it is not speaking of spiritual gifts
 - (2) It seems to be speaking of ministry
 - (3) So Paul could have just as easily said “To each of us ministry has been given”
 - (a) Sounds like ministry for each person is not optional
 - b) This grace for ministry has been measured out by Christ as He sees fit
 - (1) So some may have grace for much responsibility and ministry
 - (2) Others may have smaller or more narrow focus to their ministry
 - (3) But make no mistake that each person is given grace for ministry
 3. Next Paul launches into why he says we all have been given this grace for ministry
 - a) He quotes Psalm 68:18
 - (1) He is using OT proof that this is true - and this OT proof is being applied to Jesus
 - b) This section gets a little confusing because of verses 9-10 - it is a parenthetical statement explaining the phrase “he ascended”

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- (1) Some have viewed this as Jesus descending into hell - but the problem is there is no indication of that in the text, nor does it fit the context
 - (2) The better view is that it refers to Christ descending to earth and ascension to heaven
 4. Then Jesus distributes the gifts and in this context the gifts are unique
 - a) The gifts are people!
 - b) Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers
 - c) These folks are given for a purpose: to equip His people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up
 - (1) The reason why God gives us certain folks with particular gifts or callings is to build up the church, meaning the people of the church, for works of service
 - (2) So about the only job description that I have in scripture is that I am to be building you up to do the work of ministry in the church
 - (3) This is why I always tell you not to compliment me on a sermon - the best compliment you can give me is living the sermon - It's being involved in the ministry, investing yourself in the life of the church, it's viewing yourself as a missionary to the lost of our community
 5. This section brings up the responsibility of individual believers
 - a) Too many people come and listen to the preacher and do little else
 - (1) Another saying I never heard before and is sad that it is as true as it is, "The body of Christ seems to have one big mouth and many little ears."
 - b) There may be some people that have special gifts to teach or preach, all of us have the responsibility for the building up of this local body of believers
 - (1) We all have the same expectation for this church
 - (2) There is not Pastor Keith, the professional, and the rest of us folks
 - (3) We are all to be about the business of furthering Christ's kingdom through our body of Christ here
 6. The further goal is to reach unity and maturity v. 13
 - a) The unity is centered around the person of Christ
 - b) That maturity is seeking the fullness of Christ - all of who He is, deep relationship with Him
- III. A description of that maturity - vv. 14-16
- A. When we reach that unity and that maturity we will not be like infants
 1. Or tossed about on the waves

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2. Or blown all over the place by every little wisp of teaching - much of which is just cleverly disguised deceit
- B. What we will be is able to speak the truth in love to grow to maturity
 1. This speaking the truth in love is about being able to recognize false teaching of the world and tell people to stay away
 2. It is the hard conversations that we have to have with people so they stay the course that God has laid out
 3. It is also not allowing ourselves to lie to ourselves
 - a) Did you know in China that have “horse intelligent races” where they give money in exchange for tickets, and if the horse on their ticket wins they receive prizes, these people are not called gamblers but fun-seekers - and the whole time there are signs everywhere reminding people that gambling is prohibited
 - b) I think they are lying to themselves
- C. We often avoid the truth for one of two reasons
 1. Pride: we reject the truth because we want to present a better picture of ourselves
 2. Or laziness because the truth creates work for ourselves
 3. When we lie to ourselves, we need to have people to confront the lies we are buying into that society feeds us
 - a) Alcohol is NOT required for a good time
 - b) Pornography is demeaning to women
 - c) No, the majority of people, even teens, are NOT promiscuous
 - d) None of us are independent or self-supporting (we need each other, and God)
 - e) All Christians are NOT hypocrites
 - f) And NO, you cannot worship God just as well all by yourself
- D. The church really needs to be the place where people can speak truth into another person’s life in a loving manner
 1. Christians should be communication majors
 2. And doing so may be costly, but it must be done
 - a) I may have told you that when I worked at Officemax years ago my supervisor told me to go out and lie to a customer about the availability of a product
 - b) I told him I refused to lie about it for him, knowing I might get in trouble - he went out and told his own lie, and nothing bad happened for me, praise God
- E. Allow me to wrap things up here with this
 1. The church has strayed from the gospel

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- a) All of what we are talking about - how we treat each other, the fact that we are unified through the Spirit of God, yet at the same time we are diverse and all have gifts, roles and responsibilities to the furtherance of the gospel and God's kingdom
- b) All of that is part and parcel with the gospel
- 2. The gospel says that God chose us for these very purposes
 - a) We have a high calling I cannot possibly overstate or over sell you on
 - b) This is why Jesus said things like "count the cost" and "no you can't go back and say goodbye to your family, or bury your dead - if you want to be my disciple its is a high calling"
 - c) When we stray from these purposes
 - (1) Our calling
 - (2) Treating one another with humility and love
 - (3) Keeping the unity of the Spirit in peace
 - (4) Seeing our diversity as a strength
 - (5) Seeing our responsibility to be involved and exercise our gift of ministry
 - (6) To reach maturity in Christ
 - (7) When we stray from that we stray from the gospel itself, and we stray from God's purposes in why we were saved
 - (a) At that point we are disobedient to Him
- 3. Personally, when I see this and how deep the gospel runs, I get excited
 - a) I want to go deeper
 - b) I want to explore more
 - c) I want to serve my Savior
 - d) I challenge you, beg you, implore you, whatever word works, recognize the truth of this for your own sake
 - (1) The alternatives are that you really don't understand the gospel - and therefore miss out on heaven and God Himself
 - (2) You live a life of disobedience - making it into heaven but accomplishing little of lasting value
 - (3) Or you jump on board, and go for the ride of your life with a Savior that called you, graced you with ministries, and brought you into a unified family that loves you