

Ephesians 4:1-16 | The Boundaries of Unity

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Welcome, we have reached the halfway point through the book of Ephesians and as we have seen the past 8 weeks, Paul's first three chapters of the book were made up predominately of a prayer for the church.

Now Paul is getting into the practical things. But that is very important to bear in mind. So often our public perception of Christianity is that it is as religion of imperatives. We just like telling people what to do. Do this. Don't do this. Act like this, don't act like this. Paul is going to give us some imperatives in the next few chapters, but it is not after he has already defined for us what Christ has already done.

The gospel is something that has happened. When we understand what has happened, we change our own actions because we have been changed by the gospel. We don't do things to become something we are not. We do things to be more authentic to who Christ has already made us in himself.

We are getting to the do portion of this book. He has stated the theology of the church in the first three chapters, and now he is showing us how that theology impacts our actions as a church.

I want to **pray**. And we will get rolling.

Paul is going to open up this passage tonight with a plea for unity. But I just want us to stop and think about that word "unity." I think it is important to think about because culture has lost the definition of unity. When culture wants unity it wants tolerance. It wants all people everywhere to allow all things at all times.

We live in a town which loves to throw around the word tolerance. If we would just tolerate each other Missoula would have a unity, a love and a chi which would make our granola crunchier and our banners more colorful. But in order to enter into that state of tolerance we have to lower, and even give up some standards of belief. That's not unity.

Unity means to be united on something. That means we not only are a group of people who stand on similar ground, but we are also distinct from something else. As the United States of America we have a constitution and government which makes us distinct from other nations. Even though we cooperate with Mexico we are not Mexico. And thank goodness we are not Canada. We have a distinction which makes us unique but also brings us together.

The world says that if Islam gave up regulations on women, if Catholicism gave up birth control, if Protestants gave up original sin, the Bible, homosexuality and pro-life positions, then we would all have a unity. No we wouldn't. If all of us gave up certain beliefs we would be the opposite of united, because we would have nothing to stand on. Unity needs boundaries.

Remove the boundaries and you have actually hindered unity by breeding a culture of nothingness. To be united something must stand at the center.

Paul is going to talk about this paradox and tension between unity and diversity today. But he is not going to talk about it between religions, or between nations or politics. He is going to discuss it in the confines of the church.

Eph 4:1

First of all we need to define this word "Called." Paul encourages us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. What is that calling? It has become

common to think of calling as something subjective. Something that happens to an individual. But here Paul is using the word in a corporate sense. We have been called to something. And Paul has spent three chapters before this defining that calling for us. We have been called to faith in Christ, and to Christ's church. That is your calling. Not two separate callings, it's not you are called to salvation and you are called to the church. You are called to salvation in Christ and to the church because they cannot be separated. Your calling is to Christ, and all that entails.

So because of our calling we walk in a manner worthy of that calling. Paul picks up in **4:2-6**. What a great passage. Peace, oneness. Unity. In the church.

So why is it that there are so many denominations throughout Christendom. I mean today is reformation day. 496 years ago Martin Luther tacked his 95 complaints against the Catholic church on the door of All Saints Church and marked one of the greatest schisms in religious history. We are a result of that split. That break in unity.

But the basis of unity in Paul's message is not the church. The basis of unity is Christ. Look at where Paul goes next: **Eph 4:7-10**.

Paul quotes Psalm 68 and says that Jesus ascended on high, and set captives free and gave gifts to men. We have access to the unity of faith, spirit, baptism because Christ has set us free.

Christ is the basis of unity. If you lose Christ you lose unity, and that is why there are so many churches and conflicts within Christianity today. When people lose Christ, you lose the ground you're standing on. Christ and his work on the cross is the unity of Christianity. He is what holds together this diverse, eclectic, weird, broken yet beautiful body which is the church. The night before Jesus died he prayed to God the father, and he prayed a great prayer of unity, but Jesus talked about a unity that supersedes denominations, race, cultures and desires. The basis for unity according to Christ is seen through the Father's relationship to Christ, and Christ's relationship to us. **John 17:20-23**

Christ has set us free from our own passions, and given us a passion for him. Not only has he set us free, but he has given us gifts.

Look back at **Eph 4:7-8**. Paul says a similar thing in **1 Cor 12:7**. God has given all things to Christ, and Christ has given us gifts as believers. This is the diversity of unity.

We all have one calling: a calling to Christ. But because Christ has given us different gifts, we all act on that call in different ways. We are going to talk about that in just a minute as Paul spells it out for us. But it is important for you to see that Jesus has given you gifts for a purpose.

What are your gifts that Christ has given you? Some of you might be saying in your head, "Man, I'm ungifted." Or on the other hand some of you might be saying, "Psh, what gifts don't I have. Look at me."

But you may have missed the most important part of Paul's message here: **4:7**

Your gifts are according to Christ. That means that you have a gift, and meaningful gift because Christ's gift was the most meaningful gift. That means that your gifts are not your greatest gift to God, your gifts are a gift from God.

Here is a helpful way to help you discover your gifts. Because you do have them, and you ought to discover them, because Jesus wants you to use them. Look at your passions. What is it that you are passionate about?

You see desire is a gift from Jesus. We all desire because Jesus has given us the gift of desire. And when you find what you desire, you can typically look at what you do for that desire, and there you can find your gifts.

I love sports. And when I step back and look at why, it is because I love the fellowship, and I

love the dialogue that comes with sports. There I can see two gifts that Jesus has given me, the ability to relate to people and an ability to communicate.

My wife has a passion for coaching, and also a passion for just talking to people, and listening to them. Jesus has given her a gift of helping, encouraging and caring.

This is an extremely simplified way to just get you thinking about the gifts that Jesus has given you, but bear this in mind when you look at your desires and passions. Desire is a gift from God, and if that desire is detached from the purpose of Christ, it can become a breeding ground for idols.

As much as I love sports, I can worship them. As much as my wife loves to help people she can be held captive by how those people view them.

We need to discover the purpose of our gifts because that will help us define them and use them in the proper way.

This is exactly what Paul is going to do next: **Eph 4:11-14**

This is a very popular passage when it comes to the mission of the church because you see all the aspects of the church. You see the apostles, the prophets, the preachers, the shepherds and the teachers, and yet you see that they exist to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

My job as a pastor is not to do your work, it is to teach you how to do work. The goal of church leadership and classes and discipleship and everything in between is not to amaze you at the programs and teaching, but to teach you how to do it on your own so that you may build up the church. You are equally as responsible to work on and in the church as I am. Now those who are pastors and overseers will have a different weight of responsibility. One day I will have to stand before God almighty and give account for how I handled his people. But you have an equal responsibility to work on the church.

That is the purpose of your gifts and passions. Your passions are meant to be used for the building up of the body. Both the strengthening of those who are already in the body, and the conversion of those who are not yet in the body.

That is why Jesus gave you gifts. This is unity and diversity. We all have different gifts, but we all have the same purpose, the building up of the body of Christ until we attain to the unity of faith, and mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ. You are part of my growth in Christ.

Now here is the thing. Because Jesus has given us different gifts, we have different strengths and weaknesses. We need to embrace that. Some of you are more outgoing, some of you are more insightful, more academic, more relational and we need all of that.

Sports is such a great platform to understand this team aspect. And teams have great unity. People fighting with the same jersey for the same cause. But you know what kills that unity the quickest. It's not a lack of skill. It's a lack of desire. There is no unity with slackers. Nothing tears apart a team quicker than a member who doesn't care. It is crippling.

And because Paul tells us to bear with one another in love, in love I tell you the best thing you can do with your life is love Christ, and use the gifts he has given you for the strength of the church. If you are not participating in this Paul warns that you will be carried away by the winds of false doctrine, because those who labor in the church of Christ are anchored in the truth of Christ.

Those who don't are never surprised to find themselves as the chaff which is carried away by whatever fad comes next.

But you, being set free in Christ and laboring on the church, in the church, for the church and as the church will experience the greatest growth you have ever known. The greatest joy you have ever experienced, and the greater unity with God and with others.

The result of you doing your part, and me doing mine is a body united in love. **Eph 4:15-16.**

You see it blows my mind when people see the church and see narrow minded, hateful, apathetic people. That is not what the church produces. That is what sin produces.

When the whole church moves together to fullness of Christ, with the gifts that Christ has given the world will only see love.

And not this ambiguous chick-flicky love. But real love. Love defined in the person and work of Christ. We build each other up in love when we play our role. We encourage each other towards Christ when we use his gifts for his church. We promote real, true lasting unity with God the father when Christ is the message of our mouths and meaning to our movement.

This is what it means to be a body in motion. This is the gospel of the church.

It is hard, and that is why we need each other. But there is not greater message than the message of Jesus Christ. There is no greater unity than the unity that Christ has with the Father, and through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has brought us into that relationship.

He has redeemed our passions from sin, and given them over to a labor of love. Using our skill and our talents to help show Jesus as the doorway to a greater hope and a true acceptance.

We still have three weeks left in our Ephesians prayer challenge, and as you work through that challenge, pray that Jesus gives you the vision to see your gifts and utilize them in his church.

Pray that your calling is sure because you have seen the beauty of Christ as revealed in the cross.

And pray for GCF and Sovereign Hope. Pray that as the body of Christ moves with the person of Christ, people respond in a wake of worship.