

To the Saints at Kossuth Street . . . A Church Grows

Ephesians 4:1-6

February 13, 2011

Intro. Read with me please Ephesians 4:1-6. We come to the mid-point of our study of Ephesians. If we were to summarize the message of the book in the form of the value statements we have been considering it would look something like . . .

God's blessings in Christ are graciously, breathtakingly overwhelming.

Therefore we commit ourselves to reflecting God's love and grace in our daily lives and relationships.

The call to connecting your behavior to your belief is a fresh call to a new and greater commitment of your heart and life because the blessings from God in Christ and the glory of God in the church never become static or stale. Is greater commitment to Christ possible in your life today? If so, what would that look like? How would you ever pull it off if you wanted too?

A church that honors God grows. It grows in commitment to match individual and corporate behavior to held beliefs about God. The remainder of the Ephesians letter is about matching behavior to belief. It is a powerful way to grow. The greatest focus on the church growing in the NT is that of closing the gap in our lives between behavior and belief.

We turn our attention to grow greater commitment to match our behavior and belief to the subject of unity or as it is described in 4:3 – ‘the unity of the Spirit.’ Note that verse 3 commands us to walk worthy by maintaining, protecting and preserving this unity that is created by the Holy Spirit. When our thoughts turn toward unity in the church we usually think of denominationalism, divisions and separation rather than something that we have that must be diligently and aggressively maintained.

Tell Emo Phillips story.

Two thoughts from verse 3 set the stage for our growth in this significant mindset change regarding unity.

1) Whatever unity is . . . we are commanded to make every possible effort to maintain it.

Eager – zealous, diligent, great effort

maintain – keep it up, whole Rom. 14:19

2) The unity of the Spirit is staying aligned with what the Spirit is doing through the gospel.

2:14 – peace through the cross

2:19-22 – no longer this, but this . . . by the Spirit

Our individual and corporate growth in maintaining and protecting the unity given us by God's Spirit is a major component of matching behavior with belief. Let's grow together by considering that which unites us and attitudes that divide us.

Note Jesus prayer recorded in John 17:20-23 p.903 ‘being one’ is for God's glory and so that the world may come to know God.

7 Basic Realities that Unite the Church

4:4-6

Our motivation for keeping the relationships of our church family preserved and healthy come from the common or shared new life we have in Christ. What aligns us with each other and connects us to each other is the shared transformation of the gospel by the Spirit. The scriptures list 7 unshakeable realities that describe what binds us together. We all share in the oneness or unity of these great gifts.

1. One Body . . . we are organically related to each other.

Works together though made of several parts 1:22-23 2:16

2. One Spirit . . . the Holy Spirit is the common possession of all believers.

1:13 2:18 2:22 4:3 5:18 1Cor. 12:13

3. One Hope . . . we experience certainty and expectation of life with Christ.

1:18 2:12 calling

4. One Lord . . . all true Christians submit to one Lord, Jesus Christ.

1:3 1:15 3:11 5:22 Matt. 6:24

5. One Faith . . . we share both common trust and truth.

Experience of faith – 1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17 Content of faith – 4:13; Col. 2:7; 1Tim. 3:9

6. One Baptism . . . Christ followers publically identify themselves with Christ and his church.

Rite of initiation Matt. 28:18-20 Acts 2:38, 41

7. One God and Father . . . we believe that we live in a God created, God controlled, God sustained, God filled world.

1:21-23 3:9 of, over, through, in . . . everything

Illustrate Spirit unity with corporate/denominational slant and individual/personal slant.

4 Current Mindsets that Divide

Our church and churches like ours are in need of reformation in this commitment to match belief and behavior relationally in terms of our attitudes toward each other. Maintaining and expressing God's agenda in our relationships and responses is a huge challenge. We have developed habits and mindsets that divide us rather than unite us. Let's draw our attention to 4 current mindsets, attitudes or habits that stifle the beauty of the reflection of the eternal Godhead in our church community. These are 4 of the most deadly and divisive.

1. **Prejudice.** This is a built in bias toward certain people determined by race, gender, social standing, temperament, religion or appearance.

Some /certain types of people you just don't get along with. Diversity from a distance is fine.

2:13-19

One body – new identity

1Cor. 12:12-13

2. **Preferences.** These are 'unfortunate convictions' that have grown to the same level of authority as bible based truth. We separate, distance ourselves from and talk demeaningly about those who do not share our preferred way of living the Christian life.

Common preferences that easily become accepted equally with truth include worship style, meeting times, dress style, political persuasions, bible translations and traditions.

Col. 2:16-23 – self made religion

one hope, Lord and faith

3. **Uniformity** This is seen in the sincere and compassionate effort of many to create unity in various ways. Rather than a Christ centered unity to be maintained, it is a uniformity to be created.

This is often expressed in these ways . . . unity is you becoming like me; me becoming like you or each of us needs to become a bit more like each other.

Unity is each of us aligning ourselves to the ways of the Spirit in Christ.

Phil. 1:27

4. **Individuality** This is expressed by the number of people in the church who are trying to earn their identity or prove their worth as individuals rather than as members of God's new community.

We ask the question, 'Where does God fit into the story of my life?' when Eph. 2:11 – 3:13 makes it clear that the real question we should ask is 'Where does my little life fit into this great story of God's mystery and work?' 'Who am I?' must be answered by who you are in relationship with others . . . a child of God, a member of Christ's body, a dwelling place of God's Spirit.

Ownership is an expression of individuality - a subtle elevation of rights and privileges to those who have earned them by tenure though years of faithful participation. Years of faithful participation begin to trump one faith, one Lord and one God. The individual or the community central? Which is God building and why?

Summary/review

7 Basic Realities that Unite the Church

4:4-6

4 Current Mindsets that Divide

1. Prejudice.

2. Preferences.

3. Uniformity

4. Individuality

Take Aways

1. Acknowledge and repent of your neglect of maintaining unity – determine to change a mindset.
2. Thank God for his great love that has placed you into eternal relationship with him and others.
3. Turn from your sin and cry out to God today for him to save you from your sin through faith in Christ.

Study Questions

The first three questions are from last week's study for those who did not have group – they are foundational to understanding and applying today's study.

1. Read Ephesians 4:1-16 as a group. Glance over chapters 4-6 of Ephesians listing the various topics or issues that are addressed. Discuss/evaluate the statement that 4:1 serves as the topical sentence for the rest of the book of Ephesians.
2. Review the value statements from the introduction. What makes a good value statement helpful? What makes a value statement nonsensical? Share your perspective on behavior matching belief in your own life and in the larger community of the church? What is Paul's message regarding behavior and belief?
3. What is God's calling on your life . . . what does it mean? Review the five quick answers regarding God's calling on your life in the notes and then list five more that you find in 1:15 – 3:21. (example . . . have access to God, 2:18; raised and seated with Christ 2:6) Have group members share their personal evaluation of their understanding of God's calling on their lives as taught in Eph. 1-3.
4. 'The unity of the Spirit is staying aligned with what the Spirit is doing through the gospel.' What do you think of this description of what it means to maintain the unity of the Spirit? If it is acceptable, what is the basic or core issue that you must know and value in order to maintain unity? Describe what the Spirit is doing today from Ephesians 2:11 – 3:13.
5. Of the 7 basic realities in 4:4-6 that unite the church, which do find most compelling? . . . most difficult to understand? . . . most challenging to your current mindset toward others? What is the message of the combined weight of these truths?
6. Of the 4 mindsets that divide, which do you struggle with more than others? Why? How can each divisive mindset be answered by the basic realities?
7. Is maintaining unity in our church more about loving and connecting with those who differ or about peacefully keeping a distance from them while remaining a part of the same congregation? Why does maintaining unity require so much effort (eager to maintain)?
8. What do you want to do, use or remember in the coming week from this study?