

## Rooted & Grounded In Love ~ Ephesians

Week 5 ~ 4:1-16

We turn a corner in the letter to the Ephesians as we hit what we call Chapter 4. You may recall from earlier discussion guides that the point was emphasized that “*the indicative precedes the imperative*”. We can think of chapters 1-3 as the “indicative”...i.e. Paul was establishing a foundation of facts, truths, reality, that he would later build upon in chapters 4-6. Or, to put it another way, in the first three chapters Paul was outlining right beliefs and doctrines (orthodoxy), and now he is moving into right response and practice (orthopraxis). Again, we’ll see the mood of the verbs shift from indicative to imperative (commands)...but these only make sense when built upon the foundation of sound theology that Paul has laid out in chapters 1-3.

We can accurately say that 4:1, namely the exhortation to “*live a life worthy of the calling you have received*”, governs the whole rest of the letter. Paul simply expands upon what that means and looks like throughout the rest of the letter. Chapters 1-3 can also be considered a summary of what we have been called/invited to. So, in essence, Paul is now saying, “And here’s the proper way to respond to such a calling/invitation.”

As a quick reminder, we have been called into the family of God, invited into the Kingdom of God, summoned into a new humanity, to administer the reign of Jesus in the world, empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. (That’s a super-quick, though very weighty, summary of chapters 1-3.)

It is important to notice that the first issue Paul brings forth as a matter of top priority if we are to rightly and consistently respond to this calling is the topic of unity. Simply put, if we do not live in a unified manner, we do damage to the Gospel message and bring disrepute to the name of Jesus. Unity is not optional...it’s essential, critical, vital, supremely important. It demonstrates being rooted and grounded in love.

Also important to notice is that we do not create unity...Jesus already did that (and it was beyond our ability to create in the first place)...but we are called to keep it, to maintain it, to guard it. (And history would show that we haven’t done a particularly good job at it.) Paul wisely addressed HOW unity is kept—through being humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love.

Notice the emphasis Paul gives: Be completely humble....(verse 2); Make every effort...(verse 3)—though I’m using the NIV, the point is captured in most other versions/translations as well. These are not optional endeavors. These are not postures or attitudes that we can give half-hearted effort to or only give attention to sometimes. These are MUSTS...ALWAYS!

Notice also the list in verse 2 (humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love)...these are all virtues that combat the primary vice—the mother of all other sins, some might say—of pride, egotism, selfishness. What gets in the way of unity? I do. You do. The self does.

Please allow me to share from commentator Klyne Snodgrass: “*The ego is the main problem in relations, for therein lies the origin of feelings of inferiority and arrogance, of envy and greed, of prejudice and defensiveness, and of intolerance and abuse. As William Temple noted, pride is always the root of spiritual failure. The solution is in a sense of God’s grace, for grace prevents the ego from inflating its own significance...Humility too frequently is misunderstood as passivity and antithetical to success, but this is a distortion. Humility is not about drive, energy, or ability, but about valuing. It is an awareness that all we are and have is from God.*”

*The humble person refuses to value self above others or to assign more privilege or importance to self than to others. Humility is essential for good relations and avoiding sin...Egotism, on the other hand, is an idolatry of the self, the failure to realize that God is the pattern for life, not us...Disunity originates in pride...How can unity be established? It does not need to be established, for it already exists, given by God. It needs to be valued and maintained. Christ is not divided. The community is not the source of its own existence; Christ is. He is the unity of the church, for the church only exists in him."*

The unity we are called to is modeled after the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit. They are tightly connected and enraptured with one another, always, constantly, consistently, permanently. Not just sometimes or when they feel like it. The Church is called/invited to participate in that Divine Community. There is no room for ego, pride, arrogance, rudeness, indifference, selfishness, harshness, coldness, snobbery, discord, envy, prejudice, strife...let alone classism, racism, or sexism.

All the "oneness" that Paul mentions in verses 4-6—one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father—harkens back to Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. *"I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us **so that the world may believe** that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity **to let the world know** that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me."*

(John 17:20-23) It is important to understand that our effectiveness in our mission of spreading the Gospel and making disciples, according to Jesus, is contingent upon our unity.

Back to Klyne Snodgrass for a moment: *"Christians do not need to agree on everything to have unity; we need to live the unity of a common commitment to Christ...The mission of the church is at stake. Unity and mission belong together...The mission of the church is crippled by the division among various groups. Unless we evidence unity, our witness does not deserve to be heard."*

Those are strong words. Unity is a fine concept...until we actually have to do/live it. Unity is really just a manifestation of Love. As we love God and love others, we maintain the unity Christ created. It is significant to note that, as Paul begins his exploration of what right response/behavior is in light of right belief, he immediately goes to our connection with one another. The Christian faith is not an individual sport. (Life is not an individual sport, truth be told.) But we are conditioned by a false narrative that says life is about the individual. Nothing could be further from the truth. As we connect to Jesus we immediately find that He connects us with others. This is by design and intention. We can only become all that He wants for us through connection with one another. The rest of this letter will flesh this out more.

- *Paul's exhortations in verses 2-3 are clearly easier said than done. How can we cultivate humility, gentleness, patience, and love for one another? What are some practices we can do that will help us grow in those areas? (Think personally/individually as well as communally.)*
- *What makes unity so challenging? (Again, think both on a personal/individual level as well as a communal/systemic level.)*
- *How have you added to disunity by the elevation of self?*

- *What are some examples of unity that you have seen/observed?*
- *What are some examples of disunity amongst the body of Christ? What are the causes behind them? (How, perhaps, have you participated in that disunity?)*
- *When it comes to qualities/virtues like humility, gentleness, patience, etc. who is someone that inspires you?*
- *When Paul wrote Ephesians, the greatest threat to unity was the prejudice and tension between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. (It was not the only threat...but it was the primary and most specific/acute threat that dominated most of the New Testament.) That particular tension/prejudice isn't a huge threat for us today. What "us vs. them" do you think is our primary threat to the unity of the church today?*
- *If we think of chapters 1-3 as Paul offering a true narrative in a world full of false narratives, then we can think of chapters 4-6 as Paul outlining what consistently living into that narrative looks like or perhaps what evidence/fruit he would look for in someone (or a community) that claims to buy into the narrative of Jesus. What false narratives do you observe Christians/the Church struggling with (or perhaps you struggle with them) and what results do you observe from holding onto those false narratives?*

The book of Ephesians offers us the loftiest view of the Church in all of the New Testament. This makes sense because the Church is inextricably linked to Jesus. The higher the view we have of Jesus, the higher the view we'll naturally have of the Church. But, conversely, if we have a low view of the Church, it means we have a lower view of Jesus than we'd like to admit. Consider the statement Paul made back in chapter 1: *"And God placed all things under His [Jesus'] feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way."* (1:22-23 NIV) Did you catch that? Everything is under Christ, and the Church is the "fullness" of Christ! That's hugely significant. And Paul carries this lofty thought throughout this letter.

Beyond metaphors like *"the family of God"*, the *"body of Christ"*, the *"bride of Christ"*, the *"temple of God"* (just to name a few), a good working definition of the Church is *"the people who are the ongoing presence of Jesus carrying out the ongoing work of Jesus"* (We might even want to add, *"...indwelt and empowered by the Spirit of Jesus"*.) This understanding of the church helps us grasp what Paul says in the present passage.

Paul is very clear that Jesus has given gifts to EACH ONE OF US. But what are these gifts? First and foremost, the gift is Himself in the form of His indwelling Spirit. With that comes a particular role to play, a vocation to fulfill in His ongoing work. As such, we each are gifts from Jesus to each other.

A common question is how is this passage similar or different from other passages that deal with gifts? The other passages in question are I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. (I highly recommend you become familiar with them if you're not already.) The most important similarities in the passages are that Paul (who authored all three letters) consistently emphasizes unity amongst diversity; that gifts are given as God determines for His purposes; that everyone needs to use the gift they're given (or be the gift they are) for the overall benefit of the larger Body; and that love must always rule the day. The primary difference, the one that makes the Ephesians 4 passage stand out a bit, is that here the gifts are people, whereas in I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 the

focus is more on Spirit-empowered abilities. But, again, the main thrust is that we must offer, contribute, or use what we have been given—this honors the One who gave the gifts in the first place; and we must receive and value the gifts of others or the gift of others—this too honors the One who gave us to each other.

In order to continue His ongoing work through His Church, Jesus gave each of us a portion of that work to be a part of. To ensure His ongoing apostolic work, Jesus gave His Body some who are apostles. To ensure His ongoing prophetic work, Jesus gave us some who are prophets. To ensure His ongoing evangelistic work, Jesus gave us some evangelists. To ensure His ongoing shepherding work, Jesus gave His Church some pastors/shepherds. To ensure His ongoing teaching work, Jesus gave us some teachers. These functions continue the work of Christ in the world, and each of us is at least one of these parts/functions/roles within the Body of Christ.

Alan Hirsch writes, “*We therefore suggest that calling and ministry are different from leadership only by matter of degree and capacity....Everyone has a gifting, and therefore a possibility of a maturing ministry, but not everyone functions as a leader within his or her scope of ministry. This shift radically changes the way we see God’s people. Everyone is gifted and called to operate out of his or her vocational energies, but not all are leaders. Some people are designed to function prophetically, for example, but not all prophetic people will function as leaders. And some people who are gifted in pastoral care are not necessarily gifted or skilled in leadership. The same is true in all the ministries. Ministry does not a leader make. Leadership must be conceived as a calling within a calling...APEST is a part of the DNA of all God’s people, making it a universal feature of all communities in Christ.*” (From “The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church”)

“APEST” is considered the ongoing work of Jesus because Jesus was all 5 of these: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher. Here are some (very) brief descriptions of each...

Apostles tend to be pioneers, entrepreneurs, organizers, builders of systems and structures; they see the big picture and are constantly scanning the horizon; they are innovators, risk-takers, visionary, and strategic.

Prophets tend to be questioners, challengers, disturbers of the status quo; passionate, principled, reformers; correcting/critiquing.

Evangelists tend to be contagious/infectious, recruiters, motivators, enthusiastic communicators, inviters, winsome.

Pastors/Shepherds tend to be compassionate, protective, tender-hearted, caring, nurturing, empathetic, includers, helping people feel that they belong and are loved; humanizers.

Teachers tend to be thinkers, systematizers, investigative, curious, knowledge-hungry, effective communicators/explainers.

It is very important to note that all of these roles/people function best when connected with the others. When one role tends to dominate or when some roles are minimized, imbalance and dysfunction ensues. Each person/role is concerned with valid, legitimate, important aspects of Christ’s work. No one person (outside of Jesus Himself) can be all these roles...which is why we need one another.

For those of you who like outlines as a way to get your head around something, a good way to outline what we've covered in Ephesians 4 so far is:

- I. 4:1-6 Focus on Unity
- II. 4:7-11 Focus on Diversity/APEST
- III. 4:12-16 Focus on Maturity

The best way to understand “maturity” in this context is “becoming more like Jesus”. (As opposed to the misconception that maturity means acquiring more knowledge. Knowledge acquisition is easy; becoming like Jesus is hard.) Our maturity is dependent upon our unity. But unity is not dependent upon us agreeing on everything. Notice the rather short list Paul offers that we need to agree upon and rally around—One Body, One Spirit, One Hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father. That short list is the core/nucleus that we need to agree upon. Outside of that, we need to give room to disagree. Remember, unity is NOT uniformity. So when Paul thinks of the overall goal of maturity he focuses on what it takes to maintain unity—humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love—and working together to continue the work of Christ in the world—APEST. As we do this, we come to know Christ more and attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (4:13).

When every part of the Body is doing his/her part, the proper balance is struck, the proper protection is in place, the proper correction takes place when needed, then the Body is healthy and fulfills her purpose.

- *How would you describe your relationship with the Church? (What does that, then, say about your relationship with Jesus?)*
- *An apostle asks, “What’s next?”*
- *A prophet asks, “What needs to be changed, fixed, corrected?”*
- *An evangelist asks, “Who needs to hear this?”*
- *A pastor/shepherd asks, “How/who can I help?”*
- *A teacher asks, “How can I explain this?”*
  - *Which of those questions do you tend to naturally gravitate toward (like it’s in your mind without having to think about it or be conscious of it)? Which of these questions rarely occur to you?*
  - *What would you like to know more about regarding each role?*
  - *Who is someone you know who you think is an apostle? A prophet? An evangelist? A pastor/shepherd? A teacher? What is it about them that leads you to think that?*
  - *Do you know your part within the Body of Christ? Are you playing your part? Describe.*
  - *If you’re not sure what your part is, how can your community help you? If you feel like you do know your part, but aren’t sure how to function in it, again, how can your community help you?*

- *From your experience and vantage point, which role/function is well-represented within your church community? Which is under-represented? Why do you think that is? Practically, how can that be alleviated?*
- *A common frustration is with those who are part of a church (well, they attend) but beyond that seem to be rather apathetic. How might we motivate such people?*
- *What confusion or misunderstanding have you seen, observed, experienced about APEST? Why do you think that confusion/misunderstanding exists?*

### Soul Training Exercise ~ Broadening & Deepening our Appreciation for the Church

While we are regularly involved with a particular congregation (CUMC) we are aware that there are many, many different congregations scattered throughout our city, state, nation, and world, each with their own unique history, expressions, traditions, and connection/network (we often call these denominations). BUT...WE (all of us) are ONE CHURCH.

As Paul stated in this week's passage, "*There is **one** body and **one** Spirit—just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called—**one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*" (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Now we might have our own opinions, perspective, preferences, and experiences, but in order to grow in our appreciation of the inherent Oneness of the Body of Christ, you are invited and encouraged to expose yourself to a broader/wider experience of this One Church. How might we do this? There are a variety of ways.

- You can go online and check out another congregation's worship service.
- As you travel, if you're going to miss a Sunday at CUMC, visit another congregation.
- Or, simply visit another congregation here in town.
- You can read about various traditions/denominations and learn about their history and their current expressions.

The one thing I would suggest, particularly if you're going to visit a congregation (online or in person), is to visit one that is different from your own or what you've experienced in the past. Perhaps a different denomination/tradition, a different style/form/expression, or one composed of a different racial or ethnic group.

When I was an undergrad, I had a professor (Dr. Gene Sonnenberg) for two separate classes. Each semester in his classes he required students to visit three congregations (different from our own or what we grew up in) and write a short report/response about our experience. The reason he did this was to help students grow in their understanding and appreciation of the wider Church...because UNITY is important! I can tell you from experience that this exercise worked. My love for the Church has been enhanced by experiencing other forms, expressions, styles of the greater Church.

This exercise also can provide perspective, humility, and encouragement as we come to recognize and value how big and diverse our extended family in Christ truly is. So however you decide to participate in this exercise, go into it with an open mind and open heart toward our siblings in Christ.