

THE SECRET OF CHURCH UNITY - EPHESIANS 4:7-16

I. LESSON PURPOSE

To understand that unity in the church depends on every member functioning as God intended.

II. INTRODUCTION

Last week, we looked at the first six verses of Ephesians 4 to discover that walking in *unity* is at the very heart of what it means to walk “worthy of our calling.” But Jesus does not simply issue an edict for unity. In our Text for today, Paul describes how unity is to be maintained. Whereas there were 7 “Ones” in verses 4-6 -- one body, spirit, hope Lord, faith baptism, God-- there is an 8th “One” in verse 7. God’s empowering grace has been given to each one of us (vs 7) and He has gifted each one of us (vs 8). Why? So that each one of us by the grace of God may use our God-given gifts to help the church reach unity and mature (vs 13). Notice the sequence: Every member allows God to use him or her to serve others, then the body can be unified and mature. Only to the degree that every member is being used by God in service to others is the church unified!!

It takes the gifts of every believer for the church to fully function. But what do you mean by “gifts”? God can take your personhood (talents, disposition, skills, mind, etc.) and by His grace use you in service to others. We were created for good works (Eph. 2:10) and for works of service (Eph. 4:12). Our gift is when we allow God to use our personhood in serving others. God turns our unique skills, talents, disposition, etc. into a gift when we utilize these in service to others!!! Your skills, talents, etc. are not your gift. It’s when you use these in service to others that they become a gift so that the entire church can become built up (vs 12) and unified and mature (vs 13). This is how a body of believers maintains unity!!

The “flashiness” of your gift doesn’t matter. What counts is do you believe that God can use you in service to others and, more importantly, are you willing to be used? The question isn’t can God use you? The question is will you allow Him to use you? The church will be unified and mature only to the degree that every member is allowing God to use their personhood in service to others. God works in the lives of people through the gifts of every member of the body of Christ who are willing to serve others. Every member is gifted by God for the common good (I Cor. 12:7). Based on our unique personhood, God has given each of us a work to do and the empowering grace to accomplish that work. God’s power plus our willingness to be used by Him in service to others equals our gift!!! It’s called a “gift” because we are giving our life freely to another person; in that sense it doesn’t cost the person receiving the gift anything. It’s free. In another sense it’s a gift because we are being empowered by God when we use our personhood to serve others. We don’t serve others only by our own strength; it’s God who empowers us to serve others. We are a conduit through which God touches the lives of people. God knows the people he wants to reach and he uses willing Christians to perform the work.

III. TEACHING LEADERS (11-12)

Now, some members are gifted to prepare God’s people for works of service. God gave “some” to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to prepare God’s people for works of service so that the church can be unified and mature (vss 11-12).

Apostles and prophets functioned at a time when the word of God was falling fresh upon the world. Both were involved in mediating divine revelation to a hungry church. Their teaching provided the *foundation* (2:20) upon which the church was built. It was God’s revelation to them of the “mystery of Christ” (3:5) which made possible the preaching of the gospel.

God also gave/gives the church evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each position mentioned in 4:11 represents a distinct and identifiable “minister” in the life of the early church. Another word for “minister” is servant. A minister is gifted by God to serve others!!

1. Philip and Timothy are known as “evangelists” (check: Ac 21:8; 2 Ti 4:5).
2. “Pastor” (or “shepherd”) was an appointed position in the church from a very early time (check: Ac 14:23; 20:17; 1Ti 5:17; Tit 1:5).
3. “Teacher” seems to have been more than a generic term given to anyone who teaches. There were specific people given this title in the early church (check: Ac 13:1; 1Co 12:28-29; 2Ti 4:3).

IV. PURPOSE OF TEACHING (12-13)

Teaching ministers have a common function—they mediate the word of God to the church and a dying world. They all have a common charge—to prepare people for works of service. They all have a common goal—a loving, unified, growing church. Why? Because a healthy, vibrant church is the compelling evidence to a dying world that God can change the lives and hearts of people!! Lost people must “see” Jesus. They see Jesus today in a unified, loving church, the body of Christ.

Therefore, God’s teachers are “people makers.” They are to prepare (or equip or complete) God’s people for works of service. The idea here is that teaching leaders are given to the church for the purpose of ensuring that what Jesus began in us when we were saved is brought to completion. Through constant application of God’s word to the lives of individual

Christians, through training and instruction and example, teaching leaders are to mature us and develop us and help us grow up in Christ. God's leaders build up the body of Christ. All their work with people, all their service, is intended to make the church stronger and more vital and more healthy. Leaders are totally fulfilling their God-given role when every member is serving others.

V. THE GOAL IS A UNIFIED AND MATURE CHURCH

Notice how pervasive are the twin themes of unity and maturity:

"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the Son of God" (vs 13).

"and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of . . . Christ" (vs 13).

"no longer infants" (vs 14).

"grow up into him who is the Head" (vs 15).

"joined and held together by every supporting ligament" (vs 16).

Paul insists that if these Christ-given teaching leaders function as they should:

The church will keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

The church will overflow with mature, Christ-like disciples.

The church as Christ's body will reach a stature that complements its head.

The key to church unity and maturity is every member being used by God to serve others. We are created by God for works of service. Do we really believe that? As members of the body of Christ, we are called and created to serve others. As Christians our life purpose is to be a gift of God to others. Our gift is dormant if we are never willing to be a servant. We won't have to worry about unity in the Richardson East church if every member is being used by God in service to others.

VI. DISCUSSION

1. Do you believe that you have been gifted by God to serve others?
2. When is your gift evident?
3. "I am happiest and most fulfilled in my Christian walk when I am into the lives of people." Why do you think this is true or not true?
4. Do you believe replacing the toilet paper in the church's bathroom could be someone's gift? Why or why not?
5. "Spiritual gifts have meaning only when they are defined in the context of relationships." Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?
6. Why is the teaching of God's word so important in the life of a church?
7. Is there a difference between someone just teaching God's word and someone gifted to teach? If so, what is it?
8. Is there a connection between every member serving and church unity? If so, what is it?
9. Describe the difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus?
10. Is our purpose in teaching for you to know about Jesus or to know Jesus?
11. According to verse 16, what makes a loving church? This is really important, so discuss!!!
12. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 concerning your service to others?
1= not serving at all 5= serving sometimes 10= continually giving myself away

NEXT WEEK - EPHESIANS 4:17-24