

## **Unity in Diversity**

Ephesians 4:7-16

By John Maiden, Associate Pastor

February 11, 2018

Good Morning. As always, I am very excited to be bringing God's Word to you this morning. Thank you for all your prayers, encouragement and amazing food this week. We have felt so loved by our church family these past two weeks, so thank you.

Last week we started back with our study of Ephesians. Now we have moved our attention to chapters 4 and 5. As John said last week, we have titled this series "Walk This Way." Last fall as we walked through Ephesians 1-3, Paul talked a lot about what Jesus has done for us and who we now are in Christ. As we pick up in chapter 4, the rest of the book is going to teach us that now in light of what Jesus has done and who you are in him, this is how you should live.

Paul opens up in chapter 4 talking about the church and, specifically, unity in the church. John did a great job last week opening our discussion on unity. The passage that we are going to talk about today is also in the section about unity in the church, as Paul expounds more on unity and how it is seen in the church. We are going to be in Ephesians 4:7-16.

I want to tell you about two childhood friends in China. Wenqi Jia and Haixia Jia became handicapped in a severe way. I have no idea how to say these guy's names so to keep from butchering them, I am going to call them W and H. Wenqi Jia when he was three, he touched a powerline and lost both of his arms. Haixia Jia later in life lost his vision in an explosion. Haixia became very sad, because he had lost his vision to the point he wanted to kill himself. That is when his buddy W approached him and said "You'll be my arms. I'll be your eyes." So W was the eyes and H was the arms in their relationship. They decided to help each other with their handicap and together they were able to live a fuller life.

An example of how they worked together: Their village had become very polluted and trees were beginning die off. So they took it upon themselves to make a difference! Together they planted over 800 trees in the first year! I watched a video of these men. It was amazing watching them work together to plant a tree. The armless man would use his toes to pick up a branch and then direct the blind man where to put the branch in the ground. But only 2 of the 800 survived. How devastating! The ground was just too dry. Haixia wanted to give up but, as he says, his friend was stronger than him and encouraged him to press on! So, they continued planting. 10 years later they had planted over 10,000 trees. They have been able to make a small forest of new trees.

A quote in their story really stuck out to me. They said, "If we work together physically and unite spiritually, we can achieve anything." Even though they are limited physically, they were able to work together to do amazing things!

Church, we need each other, as well. In the passage we are going to look at today, Paul reminds us that all of us have a part to play in building and growing the church. God has specifically given all

of us different gifts to help serve and mature the church. We are diverse in our giftings. God has done that for a reason. We need each other! If we want to be a faithful, maturing church, we all need to use the gifts God has given us.

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:  
“When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”*

*(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

*- Ephesians 4:7-16*

## **By grace, Jesus gives gifts to every member of his church**

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

*- Ephesians 4:7*

The conjunction “but” is an important reminder to us that verse 7 flows from verses 1-6. In our unity comes also our diversity in the body of Christ. Another way of saying this is “Unity is maintained in our diversity.” That is why I have titled this sermon “Unity in Diversity.” Our diversity in the church gives us unity. But how are we diverse?

Paul says, “To each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Every single person in the church receives this grace. No one is exempt. But was it this grace that was given? Grace is used in two ways in scripture. One way is saving grace, where God in Christ gives us undeserved salvation. The grace mentioned here is not “saving grace” but what some people call “enabling grace.” This is grace given to us to enable us to do ministry, to serve. It is given “as Christ has apportioned it,” meaning every one of us has a gift given by Jesus.

How amazing is that? We had Christmas a short while ago. It was awesome getting gifts from our loved ones. Jesus, God Himself, gives spiritual gifts to us. Amazing. To further clarify what Paul is saying in verse 7, he gives us the following verses:

*This is why it says:*

*“When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”*

*(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)”*

*- Ephesians 4:8-10*

What in the world? When John told me the passage would be preaching in Ephesians, I immediately thought about these verses and was freaking out a little bit. How in the world was I going to explain verses 8-10? When first looking at this passage, it is tempting to get bogged down in verses 8-10 and wonder why in the world they are there and that they make no sense. But we know that God by his Spirit placed it here for a reason. The more I began to study these verses, the more I was in awe of God’s Word and how it all fits together. These verses are here to help us understand by what authority Jesus has to give us these gifts. How can he give these gifts? Because he is ruler and King over all.

Verse 8 is a quote given from Psalm 68. Psalm 68 is categorized as a victory hymn. Historically when someone won a great military victory, they would bring back the spoils, like wealth and possessions, of the people they had defeated. He would then distribute this to the people. Paul is comparing this to Christ victory. Christ had the biggest victory of all, as we are reminded in Paul’s

parenthetical statement in verse 9-10. Paul talks about how Jesus ascended and descended. What in the world does that mean?

In the order that these things happened, Jesus first descended to earth. This is a reference to the incarnation of Jesus. Incarnation is a fancy word for saying that Jesus became human, a man. As Philippians tells us, he left heaven and became one of us, a man. When he descended, he came to make war on sin, death, hell and the grave. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection, he defeated all these things! He is the victorious king, like we saw in Psalm 68! He then ascended. After Jesus rose from the dead he went back to heaven, or another way of saying this is, he ascended. Where he, as the passage says, "in order to fill the universe" or another translation says "in order that he may fill all things." He now sits at the right hand of God, the Father, ruling over all. Jesus has earned the right to give gifts to his people, the church, so that they can serve the church.

Jesus is the giver of the gifts that we receive. I love what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 when he says "I am what I am by the grace of God." In no way should we boast in ourselves because of the gifts we have received.

I don't know if you knew it or not but there was this football game that took place last Sunday called the Super Bowl. We had an amazing time at Milton's, by the way, and I hear this might become a Perry Creek tradition. Anyway, after big games I love watching the postgame celebrations. What a joy it was to watch the Eagles celebrate on Sunday night. Now I am not an Eagles fan, but I very much appreciated how almost everyone that spoke gave all the glory to God. As well as they should! For He is the one who has granted them their physical ability.

Spiritual gifts are different than our physical abilities. As the church, we should be glorifying and praising the one from whom our spiritual gifts have come from. There is no room but praise for these blessings that we have received from Him.

**We are to use our gifts to serve the church.**

*“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers”*

*- Ephesians 4:11*

Why does Paul only mention these gifts? Paul tells us that all of us individually receive gifts, but in our gifts, there are different roles given. In the gifts that Jesus gives us, there are no gifts that are more important or more valuable, but there are gifts that serve different roles.

I love baseball, and I was OK at it. I was a pretty good catcher. But throw me out as a pitcher and it would have not gone well. You know that a curve ball? Yeah, mine doesn't really curve. But that's OK! We had people on our team who were great pitchers who could throw great curve balls! Their role was not more important than mine, but it was different. People would ask me all the time if I liked being a catcher. To them the thought of getting thrown at by 90 mph fastballs and having to use your body to block balls in the dirt sounded miserable. But to me, I loved it! We both needed each other to be a successful team.

The list of gifts Paul gives in verse 11 are gifts of leadership given to the church. These are the gifts given to the church to help equip its members. The leaders in the church that Paul mentions are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Paul focuses is on those who teach the word and care for God's people.

**Apostles and prophets** - there are two ways that we can talk about these two gifts. We can talk about these two gifting is a technical sense as well as a general sense.

\* Apostles: In a technical sense, these are people who were personally sent and chosen by Jesus himself, and witness him resurrected. There are only 13 of these bad boys, Paul and the 12 disciples that included Matthias. In a general sense, apostle means “sent one,” which we are all sent by Jesus. I do believe Paul is referring to the former here.

\* Prophets: In a technical sense, they were forth-tellers, declaring the truth of God, as well as fore-tellers, predicting what God will do. In this technical sense, we do not have prophets like this anymore. We have the full account of God's word. But in a general sense, prophets are those who apply God's word, and that is happening all around the word today. I believe Paul again here is referring to the former.

**Evangelist and pastor/teacher** - these are the gifts that are very much present in today's church:

\* Evangelist - Those who are especially gifted in proclaiming the gospel. Mainly those who are unbelievers and call them to faith in Christ. Obviously, we are all called to do this, but some people are more gifted in this area than others.

\* Pastors and teachers - Some people think these two roles are to be grouped together because of the lack of the Greek article “the” between them. What we know for sure is both these roles play an important part in the church. The pastor is called in take on both pastor, or translated shepherd, and teacher of God's word.

All of these roles are people who are gifted in proclaiming and teaching God's Word. The pastors of the church main role is preaching and teaching the Word of God. This is why we are a church that practices expositional preaching and teaching. This is a fancy word for saying that we preach God's Word. We take and passage and walk through it, like we are doing today, and teach what God has to say to us. It is not the opinion of John or myself that matters. It is the word of God that matters!

*"to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"*  
- Ephesians 4:12

The teaching of the Evangelist and pastors/teachers is to equip the people of God for ministry. Part of the pastor's job in the church is to help prepare people to do ministry alongside them. Every single person in the church has a ministry! Remember back to verse 7! All of us have been given gifts and those gifts are to be used to serve and build up the church. All of us have unique gifts and talents that the church needs, if we are to grow and mature like God desires for us to.

Paul pushes up against the notion that ministry is just for the pastors and staff at the church. The pastor is the one who tells people about Jesus. The pastor is the one who helps the person going through a tough time. We need to have an "every-member ministry" mentality. We are all a part of serving the church, using our gifts and serving each other.

The question we all need to ask ourselves is simply: "What are you doing with the gifts that God has given you?" We have already established that if you are in Christ, you have gifts. Are you using them?

I Corinthians 12 is another passage that deals with spiritual gifts, as well as Romans 12. In these passages, we see a more exhaustive list of different spiritual gifts. Paul here also mentions apostle, prophet, teacher, but also gifts like, administration, healing, service, encouragement, leadership, mercy, and more. The question will arise: "How do you know what your gifts are?" This is a very good question!

There are a lot of different thoughts on this. I have done a lot of those spiritual gift surveys, and I do think they can help some. But I don't know about you, but they kind of make me nervous. Maybe it's because I overthink everything, sorry Sarah, but it takes me 15 minutes to decide if I am a five or a four on mercy to others. While they can be helpful, I believe, you might find other ways helpful, as well.

**1. Just start serving.** How tempting it is to not be serving because your copout is "I do not know my gifting." One of the best ways to find out what your gifts are is to just start serving! Just do something. The church can't afford you to just sit on the sidelines. For the health of the church, we need your gifts! I have heard the stat that in most churches 10% of the people do 90% of the work. I think this is a stretch and definitely not the case here, but we need to be careful of the tendency to allow the same people in the church to do all the work.

**2. What are you passionate about?** What do you want to do? What do you love doing? I believe God gives us passions for a reason. You love kids, serve in kid's ministry. You love helping others? We have hospitality and outreach.

**3. What do others say your gifts are?** God uses his people to help us discern our gifts. I know he did for me. I remember in college when I was wrestling with God calling me into ministry, one of the pastors at my church came up to me one day and said randomly "When are you going to surrender to ministry." When I finally did, I told another pastor how God had called me into the ministry and I surrendered to that call. He said "Well, of course, I knew that was coming." Other people can give us insight into what the Lord has gifted us with. Ask them! Ask your spouse, your friends, your small group "What do you think my gifts are?"

**4. What are the needs in the church?** Is there any area at Perry Creek that I see a need and can help? Maybe it's something not so glamorous, like set-up or tear down. Or media? Kelley says amen. Just ask where we need help and we can direct you.

Start serving and building up the body of Christ. It can be something simple like taking meals to new parents. Can I just tell you that the meals that many of you have blessed my family with since Sadie has been born has been amazing! We have been extremely blessed and through it you have blessed the body of Christ. All of us have a gift from Jesus. Will we use them? If not, we are saying no to God's grace and hurting the church.

We have the privilege to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves. Paul Tripp says it this way: "Your life is much bigger than a good job, an understanding spouse and non-delinquent kids. It is bigger than beautiful gardens, nice vacations, and fashionable clothes. In reality, you are part of something immense, something that began before you were born and will continue after you die. God is rescuing fallen humanity, transporting them into his kingdom, and progressively shaping them in his likeness - and he wants you to be a part of it." As members of the church of God, we get to be a part of advancing God's eternal kingdom!

## **By serving, the church grows in maturity**

*“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”*

*- Ephesians 4:13-14*

As the church is unified by the use of our different gifts, the result of being unified and using our gifts is the Church's growth in spiritual maturity. As the church is unified by using their various gifts to serve the church, spiritual growth takes place. Paul tells us what a spiritually mature church looks like, that uses its gifts to serve.

**1. Becomes like Christ:** “To mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This is the ultimate goal of our Christian walk. We are to strive every day to become more like Christ. As the church, we are called to help each other do that! The church is to help us grow in Christ by serving each other and using our gifts.

## **2. Grounded in God's Word:**

*Unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God*

*- Ephesians 4:13*

The faith here is referring to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church needs to be united around the truth of Jesus' love and sacrifice for us. This knowledge is more than a head knowledge but also involves the heart, to know Jesus personally and have a deep relationship with Him. As we mature, we are to grow in the unity of the truth of Jesus and in our relationship with Jesus. When we are grounded in God's Word, by teaching and learning it at worship gatherings, to personal time in God's word and prayer, then we are able to withstand false teachers and false doctrine. When we are not grounded in the truth of the gospel and growing in our relationship with God, we are like baby Christians. We are prone to falling for false teachers. They are baby Christians who are easily swayed. Paul gives a picture of waves and wind blowing someone back and forth in the sea. Another illustration that I saw someone give was that crazy bat game. In high school, we used to have a day of games where the grades competed against each other. One relay we had was the dizzy bat game. You know this game - they spin and then are weaving every which way. I never wanted to play that game. This is what Paul is talking about. When we are not grounded in the truths of God's word and in Him, we are easily deceived. They fall for the newest, biggest, most popular, teaching.

Some examples of false teaching are all religions are the same, or there is more than one way to get to heaven, or Jesus wants more than anything for you to be wealthy and healthy, the Bible is not true. This is why it is important that we are unified in knowing and believing God's Word. We got to know it. We got to get in God's Word, personally, one on one, in our small groups, in all our ministries, and from the pulpit. At an early age, we want to prioritize God's Word. I absolutely love

our curriculum from our Treehouse, our elementary age kids. Every three years kids will have gone through the entire Bible. That is over two times if you go through our children's ministry, before you go to our Rooted, youth ministry. We desire all of our church, starting with kids through adults, to unified in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

- Ephesians 4:15-16

### **3. Speaks the truth and builds up, in love.**

This can kind of be a characteristic of our previous one, because this flows from being grounded in the truth of God's Word. A way that we help each other mature in Christ is to speak the truth in love. As Christians, we are called to always live and speak truth, but it should always be accompanied by love. The truth that Paul is talking about here is the truth of God's Word. This is not talking about when your friend comes to you and asks if this shirt makes them look fat and you tell them, no even if it does. OK, it is God's Word. Again just like our last. We can tend to swing one way or the other on this issue. We can be someone who is constantly giving someone the truth of God's Word and how they need to change, but it carries with it no love. We can also tend to show people love and allow them to believe and do whatever they want because we might be afraid it will offend them. Are we a church that stands rooted in the truth of God's word no matter what and speak it in a loving way? A bad example were the preachers that came to my college campus. Not loving, not helpful, actually does more damage than good. A good illustration: Counseling is used to help people deal with truth. They do an amazing job telling people really tough things that they need to hear for their own good.

We cannot afford to fail here. If we see another brother or sister living in sin or a way that could hurt them, we need to confront them about it. For the sake of their souls and for the sake of the health of our church, and for the sake of the world. The world is watching.

*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

- John 13:35

Church, are we speaking truth to each other and to a lost world and are we doing it lovingly? What does this look like? Could be a good small group discussion?

*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

- Ephesians 4:16

**4. All members empowered by Christ, uses their gifts.** We need each other! What a great summary verse of this passage. As this passage says, we each have a part. Each part needs to do their work. We all need each other to have a healthy, mature church and grow in Christ.

Remember our introduction of W and H. They needed each other. Church, we all have different strengths and weaknesses. Jesus, in His grace, has gifted us in such a way so that if we all use of gifts we can complement each other and help one another grow to maturity in Christ. The church needs you. Will you serve as Jesus has called you to serve?