

United in Diversity  
(p. 3)

This morning we are making a journey back to where we began at the beginning of this year... the book of Ephesians. We spent the first couple of months going through this book together – making it all the way to chapter 4. But then we went on a little bit of a hiatus to study about the passion of the Lord Jesus leading up to easter Sunday.

Well it is time to get back to this beautiful letter written by the apostle Paul. I feel obligated to share with you, just as a review the background of the book of Ephesians. In case we didn't remember. that is normal for anyone. I too had to go back and look at what we have covered.

But the book of Ephesians is considered by many to be the Grand Canyon of the new testament – covering the vast depth, height, breadth and width of God's plan for humanity and for his family.

***But Paul wrote Ephesians in the middle of the first century (in the early 60s) from a prison*** either in Rome or Caesarea Philippi... he was under house arrest for his love of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his hatred of sin. now how do we know that? well because back in Paul's day, Rome, under the leadership of Nero, an evil and pagan ruler, had an incredibly ungodly social and civic life. it was violent, it was intertwined with pagan worship, it was disgusting and immoral in every sense of the imagination. You name it, they had it. Have you ever walked through a city in the united states and felt evil in the city? Rome was like that. the Christians wouldn't participate. And Paul was one of the leaders in not participating. For that, he was regarded as a pest...

He also had this against him... he was embraced by gentile people, he was not a fan at all of the Jewish system of doing things since he was a believer in Christ, and for that, they sought to destroy him. Which is why he was in prison in the first place.

But prison, house arrest, being chained to a roman soldier – was not a thing to bind him, rather he was still free in the Lord to carry out his work and his calling as a believer in Christ and a witness for Christ.

Paul was a prisoner for the cause of Christ. He wrote this letter to express his love and concern for the saints at Ephesus. Regardless of the circumstance, he is worshiping and witnessing for the lord Jesus. That's just a quick reminder of how we can use the time today. God does not desire for any of us to waste the time of our stay at home order...and our circumstances are far better than Paul's, believe me. We are not in chains. We are not under immense persecution. And we have so much more at our disposal than the apostle Paul ever had.

I have tried to imagine what Paul or Jesus or any of his disciples would have done with the opportunities we have today if they lived in our time... endless opportunities.

***Paul wrote this letter with two things in mind: Exalting Jesus, the Christ, and edifying / encouraging the church.***

Jesus is the exalted Lord of the church. Jesus is to be glorified, worshiped, blessed, and known throughout the world through the calling of the church. And much attention through this letter is spent on the building up of God's people the church. God's church is called to become more and more like Christ. We are called to look like Him, live like Him, labor in his name, and long for his kingdom to come again on this earth at his return. For this to happen, we must be about these things. Christianity was never meant to be "Jesus and me, under a tree" – no god has placed us in the body of Christ to accomplish his purposes. God has put us together so that when the world looks at us, and hears us, they will say "Wow, this is what Jesus is like" A disciple should be like his teacher.

I love the church. And it is not because I am a pastor. It's not because my way of living is supported by the wonderful people of midway Baptist. I love the church because you and I, if we are in relationship with Jesus Christ, are a part of a forever family, who get to live and serve and worship our King, together, united, in every way for his cause, for his kingdom, for his glory. And what we are a part of... will not just last a lifetime or a few generations after us or even just a few centuries after us... no this work is eternal. This mission is for eternity, and it will last forever.

We belong to the church.

And that is what Paul set out to write to the Ephesian believers. ***We are the united body of Christ on a mission for the glory of the lord Jesus.***

There are three themes running in the book:

**Believing on Christ (chapters 1-2) knowing Christ – our worth = knowing what we believe.**

***Building His Church (chapters 3-4) growing in Christ – our wealth that, is the riches we have in Jesus – there is so much blessing in belonging to Christ.***

**(who we are in Christ (27 times that is said – who we are in Christ) as His church, but he also covers our walk... how we are to live.**

**Battling for His Cause (chapters 5-6) showing Christ – even in the thick of the battle – our war**

There is now a shift in focus. For much of the first three chapters we have focused on what believers in Christ know, but now we are moving on into how believers ought to live. Who we are is one thing, what we do another, but when they are together, that makes up the totality of a person? ... it is about remembering who you are that should shape how you walk.

So, you could say Paul takes us beyond just giving us words of information into a section about application. This is how we are to walk. I have talked about what we believe now I want to focus on how we are to behave.

When we were last together in the book of Ephesians, we spent time learning about our walk in Christ... in chapter 4

In the first few chaps Paul is writing about who we are – a child of God

In the fourth chapter he is saying live as a child of god.

Our call is found to walk worthy of the calling we have received

Then we see some characteristics of that calling – we are to walk with humility and gentleness and with patience, bearing with each other – making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. And what is our cause = to be one... one as the body of Christ – one spirit – called to one hope, one Lord, one faith one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all.

But today I want to take us further – we have seen the unity in our walk. But I want us to focus today on the spiritual diversity of this unified body.

How can this be? This is a great family, with a new life and new faith, a new calling, new standards, relationships, with different kinds of people from all walks of life... but they are unified in Christ. Christ is the foundation, the commonality, what brings us together. We would be foolish to think that there are better or more elite Christians out there vs others. We are the same in Christ. We all have been worthless, wretched, and would have been condemned sinners, but we were miraculously saved by the grace of God. We are part of the family. And yes, it is a diverse family, but it is a sacred and unified family in Christ. We're not the same... but yet we have an unbreakable bond in the Lord...

What I would like to do this morning, is to preach a message about our spiritual diversity. I want you to walk away being more thankful unto God for the church today than you ever have before. Be thankful for the people (members) that make it up. Be thankful for their calling, their passions, their desire to make Christ known in unique ways. Be thankful for the mission of the church. And how it is accomplished. Be thankful for the movement of the church- understanding how God has blessed, sanctified, protected, and preserved the spreading of the Gospel all over the world so that world may know Him.

Let us read together Ephesians 4:7-16 and I want to share with you some characteristics of our spiritual diversity

## 1. The source of our spiritual diversity

V 7

I want for you to understand this today: consider what you are gifted to do in the body of Christ. If you are a pastor, teacher, apostle, prophet, evangelist, the list goes on and on. in 1 Cor 12 – there are different gifts... message of wisdom, message of knowledge, faith, healing, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues. romans 12 talks about gifts of encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy, prophecy, service, teaching... it's diverse. Nobody possesses all the gifts, but everybody possesses a spiritual gift to build up the body of Christ.

But here's the thing – as you are gifted in any way, don't think for a second that this is on your own ability or power or strength. ***These gifts are given to you so that you would not boast in yourself and what you did, we are to boast in the Lord, because he has made us, he has gifted us, he has enabled us to be used by him and for him for his glory and praise.***

My preaching the gospel is not to for me to make my name great

My teaching and writing and encouragement and leadership and service and shepherding is not to build me up at all. The only reason I get to do what I do and get to serve how I serve is because of Jesus my savior and my god. My lord. Read verse 7

“to each of one us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Whose? Christ's – he is the source of our spiritual diversity.

I need for you to lean in on this word today – the essence of the gospel is not about what you do or I do for God – God doesn't need us – God can certainly do it through another willing servant if there are no willing servants he will use other means, he can do it himself, but he has chosen not to! He has graciously allowed us the opportunity to be his children. He has graciously allowed us to be his church. He has graciously allowed us to do his will and work through the church. God calls us and enables us to do for his glory in response to what he has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ. ***The gospel is not about what we do for god, the gospel is about what God did for us.***

We can walk in Christ because of the work of Christ. And we are worship the lord Jesus and build his church, edify his church, encourage his church and bless his church and ultimately be a witness to the world because of Him!

So, we cannot boast in ourselves. Ha-ha -what do we have to boast in? What are you able to do on your own that will be eternal? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. We need Christ. Without Jesus we do not have a mission. Without Jesus we do not have a message. Without Jesus we are and have nothing. Sure, you have your skills but to what end? To benefit yourself. To profit yourself. To build an earthly kingdom that will eventually be rubble.

Christ is our source. And it is by Grace we are equipped to serve in the body of Christ. It is by grace we are diverse.

Grace. there is that beautiful word that flows through the book of Ephesians and through the new testament.

***Grace is single word definition of the gospel.***

The gospel is the good news of Gods' grace given to sinful mankind. God is a God of grace who has freely given to us salvation in Christ. It doesn't have anything to do with what you do or have failed to do – grace is given, and our part is to receive it. That's why I am pleading with those today who are listening that have ever thought that they had to do anything to earn favor with god, to earn a relationship with God. To be good enough, to be worthy enough. stop doing that.

Scripture tells us, the word of God tells us that the basis of the gospel is that we were sinful, we were lost, we are hopeless, we are without peace, we are without purpose... apart from God. And God has given – grace! God has given us the way to forgiveness, the way to fellowship with Him, the way into his family by GRACE. Grace is unearned. You could work and work and work and never be able to earn favor with God. We're sinful.

You cannot deserve it. I'm unholy because of my sin. God is perfect. He is holy and just.

You cannot buy it. You cannot heroically save yourself. We are but mere dust, fragile people who cannot control the next breath we have... only Jesus could do that. So, Grace is God-motivated... Grace is the good news that God extended His lovingkindness towards me a sinner and offered me hope when I had none.

And it is by grace I am a part of his body, and a part of his work. You have been sovereignly and intentionally chosen by Him to be a part of the body of Christ. If you are saved today, it was not a mistake. It was not for yourself. It was not for your glory. It was all for his.

And in Christ, he is worthy to be given our lives, our hearts, our thoughts, our actions, our devotion, our loyalty, our resources, our worship – all that we have because he gave all to us.

Christ is the source of our diversity... and he has in grace measured out by his design the specific portion given to the individual members.

## **2. the sacrifice given for our spiritual diversity**

Read verse 8-10

I think you know where I'm headed with this point... Christ came and died for us, He was raised from the dead, and when He did that He conquered Satan, sin, and death and by His death he led captive a host of captives = or he took the captives captive... what does that mean?

Paul is using words from the 68<sup>th</sup> psalm – it is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate God's conquest of a pagan city (Jebusite) and the triumphant ascent of the ark of the covenant to mount Zion...

You can read about that 2 Sam 6-7 and 1 Chronicles 13

Now in those days when a king won a victory he would bring home the spoils and enemy prisoners to parade before his people. An Israelite king and his army/support/staff through the holy city of Jerusalem all the way to mount Zion. Another feature of the victory would be to display the king's soldiers who had been freed after being held prisoner by the enemy – there were often called recaptured captives – prisoners who had been taken prisoner again, so to speak, by their own king and given freedom.

Now relate this to what our lord Jesus Christ has done for us! Paul looked to psalm 68:18 and saw the incarnation (descension) and ascension of the lord Jesus Christ as the evidence that God has come and rescued his people as victorious king! ***Christ came and won the greatest of battles against sin and death and hell and the devil and took hold of us – unsaved, enslaved, prisoners of Satan by our sin but now we are returned to the God and to the people with whom we belong – his kingdom!*** That is the glorious good news of the gospel – that God has a people that are to be saved that he has chosen before the foundation of the world to be His. And he took captive the captives when he ascended on high.

**And when Jesus went to heaven, he did not leave us empty handed. He gifted us.**

Some may be tempted to look at this verse and say, oh big deal. Christ came and died and rose again. Same old story. Ha-ha – I remember earlier in my ministry there was a man who came to me to tell me he saw no value in coming to church and being a part of the church because he already knew the gospel. He said I already know the story. Every sermon you give, you preach the same gospel each week. Doesn't matter what we're talking about, you always end up with the gospel... and for that, they went elsewhere.

True story. Let me share this with you today- I will never be able to get past the gospel. You will never be able to get past the gospel. Every facet of your life – from your salvation, to the wonderful truth that you’re not going to hell- to your identity. Who you are, how you live, the standards by which you live, why you do what you do, the way you lead your family, the way you spend your finances, the path you take in life – every part of my life – is because of the great gospel of Jesus Christ! So sorry – not sorry! I will not ever leave from preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. That Christ died for sins once and for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which He also went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison” according to 1 peter 3:18-19

Christ died and while in the grave he went in the spirit to proclaim victory – that all of creation is subject to Him by his death and resurrection... and when he had ascended to heaven he forever is qualified to be exalted above all... he has the rightful rule and authority over us – his people, and he has the right to gift us, his church to be used for his kingdom purposes. It does not get any deeper than that,

We are the church in identity and function because of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because of the sacrifice Jesus gave. So, adore him today, because he did not just save us from sin, he saved each one of us for service.

Christ is the ascended Lord. He has led captive the powers of evil – that once enslaved us and conquered us and attacked us and bound us, and now he has taken us captive to be set free – and has gifted us to spread the gospel and build his kingdom and not even the gates of hell will prevail.

Yes, what a savior! He is the one who came all the way down – and he has now gone all the way up for us! Amen.

### **3. moving on, let’s see the service of our spiritual diversity**

#### **Read Verse 11-16**

How I love the spiritual diversity of the body of Christ. The book of 1 Corinthians tells us that ***Christ has uniquely and individually but collectively designed his body the church to fulfill his purposes.***

Read 1 Cor 12:12-28A

***We need the church. You need one another as the church. I need you as the church. The world needs the church.*** We are a part of one another. Our spiritual wellbeing depends on our connection with Christ through his body, the church. And as believers in Christ, we have been

gifted, designed, appointed with various gifts – now in Ephesians you see various places of service in leadership. But as you read in other accounts in scripture, you see a wide range of how we can serve in Christ. Spiritual gifts are not natural talents by the way. Natural talents are what God gave by natural birth. Spiritual gifts are given to you when you come to Christ.

Now I saw this weekend what this looks like in a unique way:

My boys constructed the first Baptist church of Legos.

I'll show you the pictures!

Look at this church! Now what they had in mind was a building, but what they did was make sure that they knew the functions of the church – so they even included members! This was cool. I'll show you the pictures.

Micah's church had a preacher (his name was Emmett), worship team, Sunday school classes with teachers, a sound crew along with a church DJ for the music, and members to learn. He had offering plates, and an altar and seats for the members to come and learn.

Malachi had a preacher ([police officer), a pirate on the steeple, a praise team with two twin sisters singing, Sunday school classes, and members...

But I loved that each of them realized that church was more than a building – there were people... people with roles, people on a mission.

And what Paul lays out here in Ephesians are essential for the health of the church... he shares us the office of apostle = sent one = fits our present term for missionaries. Now some will disagree. Some will say that the office of apostle is over – it ended with the death of the 12 disciples and Paul... I tend to agree in the sense that those foundation layers in the first century, those eyewitnesses of Christ who were called apostles have come and gone. But I would not dare say that their ministry and impact cannot be used in others as a gift. I'm not here to argue with you, especially you theologians who may want to debate it... honestly, what profit does the body gain when we argue over stuff like this? We cannot even argue right now anyways. You are not even here ha-ha...

You cannot argue though that we do not need gifted missionaries who go with the spirit of the apostle. We do! We still need those who are called and sent out to share the gospel, win the lost, and establish new church bodies all over.

=Prophets – were forth tellers even more than future tellers. Prophets were called to be bold proclaimers of God's Word = prophets were called to give God's revelation. Prophets were and are preachers of the Word of God. Again... some would say the office of prophet has been removed after the completion of the new testament because no new revelation has been given or is needed, and I agree. Beware of those who claim to be prophets ... I would want to know



what they mean by the use of the word... but I would argue that the gift of prophet still exists. We still men who are called to preach and point others to God's Word. Who speak alone by the authority of the Lord, and who speak solely the Word of God – not their own? I would say to these two offices and gifts today to be incredibly careful with using the titles because they can inadvertently cause division in the body of Christ. Arguments.

***Also essential for the health of the church today are evangelists***

These are men who proclaim the good news!

The work and ministry of the evangelist is to preach and explain the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to those who have not believed. He is the proclaimer of salvation by grace through faith in the son of God.

Of course, evangelists today may appear different than what was intended in the new testament. Some men have ten suits and ten sermons and put their gospel sharing show on the road in churches and tents and crusades all over the world. I'm not knocking what they do, for it may very well be for the Lord Jesus. But I am saying their function as evangelist looks a bit different from what we see in the NT.

But NT evangelists were missionaries and church planters too (much like the apostles, just without the miracles and title). These men would go where Christ was not known and led people to salvation. They then would stay a while and teach the new believers the word, build them up and move on to new territory. They are called to teach, mobilize, and lead others to fulfill the great commission by winning the lost to Christ.

pastors and teachers

The word for pastor = poimen = shepherd. The care, protection, leadership of the flock of God.

Teacher cannot be dissociated with pastor either by the way.

In this passage, it is best to be read as pastor-teacher. pastor/elder/bishop = by the way, they are different titles, but describe the same role... pastor = shepherd, elder = maturity, bishop = overseer...

But in 1 Tim 5:17 we read that elders are hard at work preaching and teaching. They labor in exhaustion in word and teaching. They lead god's church in truth. In doctrine, belief, but also in living. But do you see how diverse the body is?

You have those who are called and sent to lay the foundations. You have those who are called and sent to preach the gospel. and share their faith whether it be before large crowds or one on one. You have those who are called and sent to lead and feed, provide for and protect. They minister to us, and with us, but they don't minister for us. Here is why I say that... in Verse 12-

14 you read that every member in the body of Christ is a minister. These men who are called to these specific roles mentioned in v 11 to equip you, edify you, educate you, extend you, and establish you in the work of the ministry.

The church is not meant to be a bus driven by the pastor where he tries to convince you to get on board...

For the work of the ministry. You have been gifted by the Lord with various spiritual gifts in which the body of Christ is enhanced. Some are gifted in areas that others are not, but it is necessary so that the body of Christ is built up, matured, developed and grown. So that it is strong and vibrant and alive. So that we will know God fully and truthfully. God wants the body of Christ to be spiritually gifted and in service so that we will be more like Him, and He wants us to be matured so that we will not be immature in our faith or baby like. He wants us to grow up in the body. Everybody has a part in that. and you have to ask yourself today, where am I in all of this? What part do I play? Surely there must be more to be a part of the body of Christ than just coming to a worship service, sitting in a pew, sometimes coming to a fellowship meal, or attending a business meeting. What is your part in the body of Christ? And how are you making Christ known in what you are called? There are so many opportunities before us... we just need to say yes to his call and commission! DL Moody (evangelist) was once confronted by a person who criticized the way he preached (his grammar) and the length of his sermons or the way he conducted his rallies (too emotional and unsophisticated).

Moody replied

"I'm doing the best I can with what I've got. What are you doing with what God gave you? I like the way I do it better than the way you don't"

***We are all to be equipped for the work of the ministry. We all have our place. and our place in the ministry is to be used to speak God's truth in love, so that others will grow up in Christ. Who is our head...and whom we are connected?***

I love being a part of the church, and I am thankful for our diversity, but I am even more thankful for the reason we exist. And that is to exalt the lord Jesus Christ so that others will know him and grow in him and show him throughout the world for his glory.