

Ephesians Week 7

4:1-16

Summary

Summary of Text

Paul now shifts his focus from his blessing and prayer which has been rich in theology, to a typical letter feature of his, the admonition. This description of how the church should practice its faith is complete rooted in the theology that he has described in the first three chapters, which is why he begins this section with 'therefore'. Verse 1 acts as a topic sentence for this section urging the church to walk worthy of their calling which he has already described in the first three chapters.

Then in verses 2-3 he unpacks further what it means to walk worthily. Our life together is to be marked with an attitude of humility, in order to maintain the unity which the Spirit provides. This is the heart of the 'already', 'not yet' tension we have been tracking through out this letter. The Spirit has already established our peace and because of that we have unity, yet we are to work at it and maintain it making it also our work.

This unity of the body and the Spirit leads Paul to underscore the heart of our faith and defines what we are to be united about; one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. On the one hand we see Paul's trinitarian formula moving from Spirit, to son, to father. On the other hand, Paul who is still a Jewish monotheist (mono=one, theist=gods/God), redefines the 'Shema' separating out one God and one Lord. The logic is that if there is only one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one hope, then there can only be one body; one people of God. This unity is vital for our witness to the gospel.

This unity is not at odds with our diversity however. In fact, our diversity itself is a gift of Christ. Christ having ascended now gives gifts to his people and Paul describes the five-fold gifting of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These ministers have been given to the church for the purpose of equipping the saints, that is all Christians, in order that they may do works of service. And, when both ministers are equipping and the saints are doing works of service this is how the body is built up into unity of faith and the knowledge of Jesus, to reach maturity. The maturity of the body of Christ on earth is aiming to have the same maturity as Christ in heaven.

Resulting from this building up, this maturity is the end of our childhood, our immaturity. Once we were easily taught false doctrine and we believed false people. Now, because we have been built up through the teaching ministry of the ministers and the works of service of the saints we are able to maturely address falsehood with truth. Receiving the truth from our head and source, Christ through the ministers and saints which causes the building up of the whole body.

Application

Our goal is always our unity. Paul is not asking or commanding he is urging us to make that our priority. He is a realist and knows that having a diverse group of people trying to live together is extremely difficult, which is why we are to have the character traits of humility, gentleness, patience and a determination to endure each other. This means that we put away our sense of our 'rights' and we are willing to be wronged. What this doesn't mean is that anything goes. There is still content to our unity. We still have a confession and sin is still taken seriously.

The second point is that we all have a role to play. There is not two levels of Christian; the professional who is to do everything and the laity who is only to show up and listen attentively. Rather, the purpose of the minister is to equip all of God's people to engage in God's mission in the world. Both the minister and the laity together form the conduits for Christ's headship in our body. Ultimately, it is this diversity which builds us to unity and to maturity in Christ, which of course is the goal.

Discussion

We had a small discussion around the question of modern day apostles and prophets. I am comfortable with understanding that there can be modern day apostles and prophets as long as what they are saying and doing conform to Scripture; neither adding to it or taking away from it.

We also had a discussion about the hierarchy of ministers. I emphasized that Ephesians is not giving one here, in fact there is a level of equality between ministers and the saints. In the end everyone in the church is meant to understand their call and gifting so they can give or use their gift for the church which is how we will reach unity and maturity.