

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Passion to Pursue Unity

Ephesians 4:7-16

PowerPoint Presentation: None

Keywords: Spiritual growth, Fellowship, Maturity, Unity of the Faith,

SermonAudio blurb: Though the Church of Jesus Christ has the true unity of the Spirit there is not a true unity with regards to the faith. All are born again by the one Spirit but then we must grow together with regard to the truth. And our Lord has not left us with no instruction on how we are to do so. In this passage Paul unfolds for us the process of growing into a unity of the faith and the goal behind it all.

I. Introduction.

- A. Last time I preached we were reminded of a oft forgotten truth, the presence of true unity.
 - 1. We saw that we display the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in our unity as the world looks on. It is a passion of our Lord and therefore it is to be our passion.
 - 2. The bible has no patience for those who seek to be divisive or troublesome in nature. They are to be warned twice and then sent out. They are described as being self-condemned and perverted.
 - 3. The New Testament is filled with various images and commands that all related to the idea of unity.
 - 4. But the one we looked at together was in Ephesians 4:1-16.
- B. Two types of unity discussed here:
 - 1. The first is a unity that all Christians already possess. The second unity, which we will discuss today, is one that we are to strive after.
 - 2. Last message I tried to drive home two key points: How do we preserve unity of the Spirit. And what is the unity of the Spirit.
 - a. There were four things needed to preserve unity (shown in vss 1-3):
 - (1) Understanding our calling—we have been called by the Father in Heaven to be conformed into His Son's image.

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- (a) We must learn to see this in all Christians.
 - (b) God is at work in their lives, in your life. Even the lives of those who you don't like or who don't like you.
 - (c) God is conforming them into Christ-likeness.
 - (d) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, (1 Corinthians 1:3-4)
- (2) Second, by living in humility. The grease upon which unity shall move.
 - (3) Third, by showing gentleness (meekness). Strength under control.
 - (4) Fourth, by being patient—which results in putting up with one another, remembering what God has done for us on the Cross.
- b. We finished by seeing exactly what the unity of the Spirit was in vss 4-6:
- (1) Three triads: The first related to the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) The second related to the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - (3) The third related to the Father himself.
 - (4) The point of all of this was that word “one.” We have all come to the One Father through the One Savior and Lord by the working of the One Holy Spirit.
 - (a) We may not agree upon music, clothing tastes, worship styles, bible translations, and countless other things, but we all must be unified on these things in vss. 4-6.
 - (b) If a person comes in the name of the Lord, believing the true gospel, then we are to welcome them as a brother or sister in Christ.

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Application

It is important to note that the unity that is described here is such that there is no reason to see a problem in denominations and such. It is often said, especially in the RCC, that the fact that there are so many denominations that it is evidence that these churches and denominations do not belong to the true church.

But this is not the type of unity that is discussed in vs 1-6. There can be serious differences in points of doctrine and yet preserve a genuine unity of the Spirit ***IF*** we are diligent to maintain it. As brothers and sisters in Christ gather in the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, independent Baptist, Brethren, and Community churches there is an essential unity that is occurring.

What happens to this unity is that it tends to go out the window as we seek to come into greater unity of the second type, which we will talk about today. Most of us have had the unpleasant experience of having some person who holds to a specific doctrine so strongly that they run roughshod over you. The conversation started out strong and ended in a tornado of destruction, with you lying on the ground under a pile of emotion, accusations, and name-calling.

So the challenge is to preserve this unity all believers have in the Spirit, all the while growing in a unity of the faith and a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

- C. Notice verse 13 with me for a moment. Notice that there is a time issue here, we see this with the word “until.”
 - 1. There is a task that the church is to be busy doing and it is not finished doing that task until two specific events have occurred:
 - a. The first is that the church attain to the unity of the faith.
 - b. The second is that the church as a whole attain to the knowledge of the Son of God.
 - c. Until these two are complete we shall not be truly unified in the faith.
 - 2. Now these two points are the heart of verses 7-16. Everything works around this goal. And it is a huge help for us because it helps show us the direction that Missio is to be moving in as a church.
 - 3. So let’s look at this passage in this manner—first, let’s understand the meaning of these two goals. Second, let’s then see how we are to grow toward these two goals.

II. Grow toward The Unity of The Faith and Knowledge of Christ (7-16).

- A. What do these two goals mean?

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1. Unity of the Faith.
 - a. The term, “the faith” is a technical word in the New Testament. It occasionally refers to a person’s faith in God. But that is rare.
 - b. The most common way this phrase is used is to refer to doctrinal truth. The term, “the faith” speaks of that body of truth that is gospel truth.
 - c. Take your bibles and go with me through several passages to see this:
 - (1) Acts 6:7
 - (2) Acts 13:8
 - (3) Acts 14:22
 - (4) Acts 16:5
 - (5) 1 Tim. 4:1, 6
 - (6) 1 Tim. 5:8
 - (7) 1 Tim. 6:10, 20-21
 - d. So the each local church is called by God to grow in the unity of the faith. This means then that we are to be striving to grow in a unity of faith and doctrine as a church.
 - (1) It is not a good thing to remain separate in beliefs and have many various beliefs as a church.
 - (2) But it is also important to remind you that as we grow toward this unity of doctrine, we are to be careful to maintain the existing unity of the Spirit.
 - (3) That person you disagree with is not your enemy.
2. The second goal is the knowledge of the Son of God.
 - a. Twice Paul has mentioned in this letter about him praying that they would grow in the knowledge of Christ (1:17-19; 3:16-19).
 - (1) What stands out in those two prayers is that it is the supernatural work of God that is required for us to grow in this knowledge.

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- (2) It comes through a growth in sound doctrine, but it is not merely a knowledge of sound doctrine. You can know the Word and not have a sound nor deep knowledge of Christ.
- b. This point is no small thing for it was a passion of Paul that drove Him onward in His Christian walk as an individual (cf. Phi. 3:8-12).
 - (1) Point out that this also shows us that you can't just pray that God will give you this knowledge.
 - (2) You have to strive after it.

Transition

So, these are the goals of the church. And any local church such as ours should be making them goals for themselves. A simple question we can ask ourselves is how does our activities, programs, and ministries promote a unity of the faith and a growth in the knowledge of our Lord?

With this in mind, let us look the tools that God has given the church so that it can move in this important direction. And in doing so, we can also see the results that come as we grow in these two areas.

- B. How can the Church grow in this unity.
 1. First through gifted teachers of various types.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:7** “But to each one of us grace was given”
 - (1) Here Paul moves us away from the corporate/group unity that he spoke about in vss. 1-6 and into diversity within that unity.
 - (2) The word “but” could also be translated here as “in spite of this” or “on the other hand.”
 - (3) In the prior verses he used the word “one” to stress the unity that we all have with one another.
 - (4) Now he uses it to show that each, individual believer has been given a gift.
 - (5) The amount of giftedness varies, it is in accordance to the measure by which Christ chooses to give.
 - (6) The list is of four types of people given to the church.

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- b. Vss. 8-10 is where Paul uses Psalm 68 to refer to the descent of Christ as a man, especially His death and His ascension, starting with His resurrection, and culminating in His return back into heaven as the conquering king, having destroyed the works of Satan.
 - (1) The imagery is quite fascinating.

After a king in those days would win a victory, he would return with the spoils of war. Along with the treasure and possessions won, he would bring along the prisoners. A Jewish king would bring them all through the city of Jerusalem. However, not only would the victorious king parade the prisoners of war, but he would also parade those people of his who had been taken captive by the enemy and are now freed.

Now see the picture that is being painted here by Paul. He is saying that when Christ ascended into heaven, He did not go alone. Rather, He ascended with all those whom He had bought through His death with Him! All of us, Paul and Peter; Mary and Martha, Luther and Spurgeon. All of us were brought into heaven with Him.

And when He ascended, He then turned around and gave to all of them, us included, gifts out of the riches He had gained. Some received large gifts, such as Paul. Others were small, but all came from their beloved King—Jesus Christ.

- (2) So we have Christ, the victorious King, now dispensing gifts to all of His people whom He has just led to freedom.
 - (3) And those gifts are people, specifically called by God to bring the Church into a unity of the faith.
- c. Notice verse 10. There is a purpose behind all of this work, and it is so that Christ might fill all things.
 - (1) It refers to Christ exercising sovereign rule over all things.
 - (2) And this is one of those “now and not yet” concepts that we see all over the New Testament.
 - (3) Christ is now in the process of accomplishing this goal and the way He is doing it is through supplying to His people everything necessary to bring it about.
- d. Notice again in verse 11 that the gifts that He has given to the church here are actually persons.

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- (1) This is different than in the other passages that talk about spiritual gifts.
 - (2) Briefly discuss the various categories.
2. What was the purpose of giving the church these people? Verse 12 gives us the answer.
- a. The purpose of the giving of these people to the church is so that the church can be equipped to do the work they have been called to do.
 - (1) To equip means to make complete, to train to maturity.
 - (2) This is the work of any pastor. This is the first and foremost job, to be in the business of training the people to go and do the work of the Lord.
 - (3) **The church was never designed to be a place where you just let the pastor and a few staff members labor.** Rather, it is a place where all believers become equipped so that they can work out their unique giftedness to serve one another.
 - (4) This is something that you need to give careful thought to. Why do you come here? What do you think your leadership desires for you to be?
 - (a) We see you as a people who are seeking to be equipped, built up, prepared for ministry.
 - (b) MDF is not here to fill your minds or be a resting place. It is a training center.
 - (5) And as the church serves one another in love they build up the body of Christ.
 - (a) This image is one of building a building. Starting with the foundation and building it up until it is finished.
 - (b) The New Testament frequently describes the church as the Temple of God. And this is the image being presented here.
 - (c) **Here is a key point that is easily missed by you and it must not be. Your pastors and elders**

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cannot build up the church of Christ. Only you can.

- (d) Notice the flow (12), Jesus gives His church certain people to equip it. As the church is equipped it builds itself up into maturity.
 - (e) As this occurs there comes a greater unity centered around truth, gospel-centered, God-exalting, Spirit-empowered truth.
 - (f) But if the church accepts the equipping but does not use that equipping then the church is doomed to wander.
- b. And this work of equipping the saint to minister to one another is to be done until the whole church is brought to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of Christ—in other words, it is never truly finished this side of heaven.
3. Take them now through vss 13c (mature man) to the end.
- a. There is a contrast that is being made in these verses.
 - (1) Mature man (singular) versus children (plural).
 - (2) The knowledge, wisdom and stability of an adult versus the ignorance, foolishness, and instability of childhood.
 - (3) The way to grow into this mature man is through speaking the truth in love. And as we do so we can begin to grow into the likeness of Christ.
 - b. In every age there have been conflicting messages of truth.
 - (1) There is a difference between weak doctrine and false doctrine. And the church needs to be showing both of these as wrong.
 - (2) I have seen too many who have listened to lies, who have wandered from the faith to find any patience here. It is one thing to deal with a person who has a simple, immature theology and a whole other thing to deal with one who is actively teaching falsehood.
 - c. To speak the truth in love is an oft misunderstood concept.

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- (1) Too often this is seen as saying the truth but doing it softly and gently. Not hurting the person or his feelings. You should try to find the positive in everything and a critical word is not helpful.
- (2) But this is not the point at all. This is really a result of the psychologizing of the church.
- (3) He does not say, speak the truth lovingly. Rather, it is in the sphere of love that we speak truth. What is the difference? A lot.
- (4) We speak truth not out of hatred, not to win the argument or to look wise. We do not do it to harm a person. But we do it because of love.
- (5) Love says that a divisive person is perverted and must be rejected. Love requires us to say that some teaching is really just human cunning or trickery. Love demands that we call some doctrine deceitful.
- (6) It is love that must drive us to speak truth. And I would argue that when we say we love someone but we refuse to speak truth to them, we are a liar.

III. Conclusion.

- A. This is the goal of a maturing Church. To display the glories of Christ in our midst.
- B. We are moving in this direction I believe. But I also believe that we have a long way to go.
- C. Why do you attend Missio? Why would you leave Missio? And how do both of those questions become answered in this passage?
- D. The idea of a passive approach to church is simply an unbiblical approach. And the idea that the church exists to meet your needs says that you don't understand why the church exists.

Small Group Questions

1. How are you ministering to the body since it is not merely the 'leadership' that is to be doing this?

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2. What is the greatest challenge for you as a result of this sermon? Why? How can this group help you in meeting that challenge?
3. Pastor Matt ended the sermon with this challenge: Why do you attend Missio? Why would you leave Missio? And how do both of those questions become answered in this passage? Discuss these questions.