

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

Theme: The Walk Worthy of Christ

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 26/06/2016 at 10:30 am

Introduction

Paul's situation and ours also show that many Christians then and now believe that you can be a Christian without the Church. However, that is like being an author with no one to read your book, or being a hockey player without a team. You see the church is not a building; it is not a program; it is not an institutional bureaucracy. The church is people in relationship, you and I struggling to live in community with each other, empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the Gospel of Christ. If this building or the organisation called "Church of England" were to disappear tomorrow, the living Body of Jesus Christ, His Church would carry on. You and I would be there striving to do our part because we know that our Unity in Christ is enough to sustain all of our human failings and predicaments. Consequently, you cannot afford to go it alone.

Consider a single stick in a broomstick. Standing on its own, it can easily be broken but together in the stack, it can accomplish a lot.

Overview

From Ephesians 1-3, the oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality. Our responsibility is to guard, protect, and preserve that unity. To do this, we must understand three important facts.

1. The character and grounds for Unity (Eph. 4:1-6)
2. Unity in Diversity (Ephesians 4:7-11)
3. Unity and Maturity (Ephesians 4:12-16).

1a. The character and grounds for Unity (Eph. 4:1-6)

Unity is not uniformity. Unity comes from within and is a spiritual grace, while uniformity is the result of pressure from without. Paul used the human body as a picture of Christian unity. Each part of the body is different from the other parts, yet all make up one body and work together. If we are going to preserve the "unity of the Spirit," we must possess the necessary Christian graces, and there are seven of them listed here. 1) humility 2) meekness 3) longsuffering 4) forbearance 5) endeavour 6) love and 7) peace.

Let us look at Verse 2: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." This, says Paul, is what it means to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Paul doesn't start with structures; he starts with love. We are to be completely humble, to put others first, and to be willing to play second fiddle. The church is not the place for showing ourselves off or for climbing over others to get to the top. Rather we are humbly to recognise the values and strengths and concerns of other people. We are to be gentle with others, not putting others down, but being gracious with them.

How easy it is to find fault in others and to become irritated with them, forgetting the planks in our own eyes, when we see the specks on others'.

And when you look at Jesus, you will notice the graces in verse 2 are all modelled by Him. Be it humility, gentleness, patience or love. He placed others' needs above his own, considering others' needs more important than his own.

Now it is pretty obvious that a church which is founded on those principles will be able to maintain its unity and togetherness. We will be prepared to let things happen which we may

not like but which we know others want and which are for the good of the church. We will be willing to lay aside our own small hang ups for the sake of others be they theological or otherwise.

1b. The Grounds for Unity (Eph. 4:4-6)

Paul now names here the eight basic spiritual realities that unite all true Christians.

One body. This is, of course, the body of Christ in which each believer is a member, placed there at conversion by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:12-31). The fact that a person is a member of the one body does not excuse him from belonging to a local body, for it is there that he exercises his spiritual gifts and helps others to grow.

One Spirit. The same Holy Spirit indwells each believer, so that we belong to each other in the Lord. There are perhaps a dozen references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians, because He is important to us in the living of the Christian life.

One hope of your calling. This refers to the return of the Lord to take His church to be with Him. The Holy Spirit within is the assurance of this great promise (Eph. 1:13-14). Paul is suggesting here that the believer who realizes the existence of the one body, who walks in the Spirit, and who looks for the Lord's return, is going to be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker.

One Lord. This is our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, lives for us, and one day will come for us. It is difficult to believe that two believers can claim to obey the same Lord, and yet not be able to walk together in unity.

One faith. There is one settled body of truth deposited by Christ in His church, and this is "the faith." Christians may differ in some matters of interpretation and church practice; but all true Christians agree on "the faith"—and to depart from "the faith" is to bring about disunity within the body of Christ. (cf Ephesians 2:8-10)

One baptism. Since Paul is here discussing the one body, this "one baptism" is probably the baptism of the Spirit, that act of the Spirit when God places the believing sinner into the body of Christ at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). This is not an experience after conversion, nor is it an experience the believer should pray for or seek after. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), but we are never commanded to be baptized with the Spirit, for we have already been baptized by the Spirit at conversion.

One God and Father. Paul likes to emphasize God as Father (Eph. 1:3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 5:20). The marvellous oneness of believers in the family of God is evident here, for God is over all, and working through all, and in all. We are children in the same family, loving and serving the same Father, so we ought to be able to walk together in unity.

2. Unity in Diversity (Ephesians 4:7-11)

Whilst we are unified, yet we are not uniform! See what Paul says in verse 7: "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."

Paul moves now from what all Christians have in common to how Christians differ from each other. He is discussing variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:1-12), and this gift is to be used for the unifying and edifying (building up) of the body of Christ. We must make a distinction between "spiritual gifts" and natural abilities. When you were born into this world God gave you certain natural abilities, perhaps in mechanics, art, athletics, or music. In this regard, all men are not created equal, because some are smarter, or stronger, or more talented than others. But in the spiritual realm, each believer has at least one spiritual gift no matter what natural abilities he may or may not possess.

A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified.

So the reason that Paul mentions these gifts in particular is because these are essential for the growth of the body. As Paul says, they prepare God's people for works of service. Without evangelists and pastor-teachers, the church will die. That's why good and godly leadership is so essential for the body, and it's why there are more stringent tests for leaders in the New Testament than anyone else. They will be held accountable for their work. So do pray for those of us who teach God's Word. We are in a serious business, and we need your prayers as we do that work.

But what does that mean for the rest of the body? Well Paul says that they are prepared for works of service? So the idea is every member ministry.

The church is not meant to be a bus: the pastor at the driver's seat, maybe his assistant taking the fares, but everyone else sitting on the bus enjoying the ride. No; the church is like an orchestra, everyone playing their part, with the leader keeping everyone in time. Everyone is special.

3. Unity and Maturity (Eph. 4:12-16)

Paul was looking at the church on two levels in this section. He saw the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, growing gradually until it reaches spiritual maturity, "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." But he also saw the local body of believers ministering to each other, growing together, and thereby experiencing spiritual unity. The members of the church grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other. The first evidence of spiritual growth is Christlikeness. The second evidence is stability. The maturing Christian is not tossed about by every religious novelty that comes along. The third evidence of maturity is truth joined with love: "Speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). The fourth evidence of maturity is cooperation (Eph. 4:16). We realize that, as members of the one body and a local body, we belong to each other, we affect each other, and we need each other.

So, then, spiritual unity is not something we manufacture. It is something we already have in Christ, and we must protect and maintain it. Truth unites, but lies divide. Love unites, but selfishness divides.

I cannot be maturing in my Christian life unless I am contributing to my fellow brothers' and sisters' maturity. And if you have a rather relaxed view of church, a take it or leave it attitude, then Paul would want to question your maturity. He would say you're still a babe!

Are you growing in the faith, are you growing more mature in the knowledge of Jesus Christ? For only then can you resist the winds and waves of doctrine. So many young Christians are blown about by the latest fads and theological crazes. If we are to steer a good course, then we need the rudder of God's Word and the support of one another to do it.

And so we need to ask ourselves, are we just along for the ride? Or are we using our God given gifts for the benefit of the whole body? I delight in those who are musically gifted, or have the gift of administration, those who are brilliant at encouraging others, those who are good with their hands. For every person, there is another gift. And that is the joy of being part of a body. No-one has everything. Everyone has something. For some it will mean getting stuck in where previously you haven't. Maybe others will be thinking, well I feel I can offer less than I used to be able. But let me encourage you by saying just by turning up on a Sunday you are encouraging others. Maybe you have more time to pray for the church. That would be brilliant. Maybe you simply get alongside one or two people at the back of church, or take the

time to visit one or two in need. Well, it all counts. And when one bit is not functioning the whole body is affected. Each of God's people are to do works of service for the benefit of the body.

Are you involved? Or are you just a spectator? We are united in our diversity.

There is a story told that when Christ had finished his work on earth, and had ascended into heaven, the angel Gabriel met him. 'Lord,' said Gabriel, 'is it permitted to ask what plans you have made for carrying on your work on earth?'

'I have chosen a few men and women' said Christ, 'They will pass on my message to the whole world'.

'But', said the angel, what if these people fail you- do you have another plan?

Jesus smiled 'I have no other plan'. I love and trust them.