

**Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God**  
***The Unity and Diversity of the Church*** (Ephesians 4:1-16)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on April 3, 2016

### Introduction

- ❖ Over the month of March we took a break from our study of the book of Ephesians to do a mini-series focused on the last week of Jesus' earthly life that built up to the Easter weekend. So now we're starting back where we left off in Ephesians. We're beginning in chapter 4, which, as we've noted, is a turning point in the book. **It's where the Apostle Paul shifts from a focus on Christian doctrine to Christian practice.**
  - ▶ The first half of the letter was spent explaining God's eternal plan through Christ Jesus to reconcile sinners to himself and to each other, calling them together as a new humanity. **And now in starting in chapter 4, Paul is urging Christians to live in light of their new identity, as a new people of God unified by the gospel.**
  
- ❖ Look at v1, "*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*". In other words, you've been called to a unity with God in the person of Christ and to a unity with each other in the Body of Christ.
  - ▶ So therefore, Church, live up to that calling. Walk in a manner worthy of it. **Let the unity that God created through Christ be made manifest in our visible, public life together as the Church.** That's the first priority in practicing our faith.
  
- ❖ The **NFL Pro Bowl** was played in Hawaii a couple months ago. Back in 2014 they changed the format and sort of ruined this illustration I'm about to give. So let's just ignore the recent changes and remember the game as it was – when it pitted all-stars from both conferences.
  - ▶ In the Pro Bowl, every player is given a new team jersey. AFC players wear an AFC jersey. NFC players wear an NFC jersey. **But what's different is that each player brings and wears his own helmet with his original team's logo on it.**
    - So on each team there's a clear visible unity with everyone wearing the same jersey. **But on each team there's diversity in their unity.** They're still sporting their own unique helmets.
  
- ❖ So in the Pro Bowl, you've got the best players, of every position, from every team in your conference, and they stand together on the field as one unit. That sounds like it would be an awesome football game. **Which such great players on both sides, the potential is limitless.** The competition must be fierce!
  
- ❖ But if you've ever watched a Pro Bowl, you know why no one watches the Pro Bowl. Everyone knows it won't be competitive. The players run lazy routes. They don't tackle hard because they don't want to be hit hard. They're laughing and joking around. The players aren't there to win a game. They're in Hawaii! They're on vacation!
  - ▶ It comes down to this: **Every player on a Pro Bowl team is more concerned with the team on their helmet than the team on their jersey.** They might get a bonus check from the team on their jersey, but the team on their helmet pays out their huge contracts in the regular season. It would be nice to win with the team on their jersey, but every player would rather win it all with the team on their helmet.

- ❖ **So yes there's visible unity on each team – in that everyone's wearing the same logo on their jersey – but every player's allegiance is ultimately to that logo on their helmet.** They're playing for the team on the helmet more than the team on the jersey.
- ❖ Do you see the connection? We practice regenerate church membership. That means the members of this church all give evidence of being born again. We're all Christians who share one Lord, one faith, one baptism. **But we each have our own unique helmet with a unique team logo.** Your helmet's logo might say: Student, Teacher, Engineer, Physician, Accountant, Consultant, etc. Or maybe it says: Parent, Husband/Wife, Boy/Girlfriend, etc.
  - ▶ And most of us have multiple teams on our helmets. You're a parent and an engineer. A student and a girlfriend. That's normal. Everyone having their own unique helmet is not the problem. **The problem is if you let the helmet define you – if you're drawing your primary identity from one of the teams on your helmet.**
- ❖ Because if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus, you have on a jersey with 'CHRISTIAN' emblazoned on the front. It's the same jersey every other believer is wearing. **But unfortunately, like those Pro Bowl players, we're not really playing for that team. We're playing for the team on our helmet.** Our concerns, passions and priorities are not that of a Christian, first and foremost, but of a parent, student, or worker *who happens to be Christian*.
  - ▶ So while it would be great to advance in our spiritual lives, we care more about advancing in our careers. While it would be nice to be equipped to serve the body of Christ, we care more about being equipped to get into the right school. We'd be grieved if our children don't grow up to love the Lord, but we'd be even more devastated if they grew up to be academic failures or social rejects.
- ❖ **So like a Pro Bowl team, a church like ours can be comprised of gifted and talented individuals but our potential goes largely untapped.** We have the unity. We have the same jerseys. But we've failed to maintain that unity of the Spirit. We've neglected it and put too much attention on our helmets. We've yet to see what we could accomplish as one body if our gifts were directed towards one glorious aim, if we're all playing for the team on the jersey.
  - ▶ As we study this passage, we'll look at it in three parts. 1) Maintaining our Christian unity, 2) Embracing our Christian diversity, and 3) Growing our Christian body.

### **Maintaining our Christian Unity**

- ❖ Let's begin in vv1-6. In order to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we've been called, our first responsibility is to maintain our Christian unity – to eagerly maintain "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*". That's from v3.
  - ▶ Now it's important to set all of this in the context of Ephesians and everything that came before in chapters 1-3. **Earlier Paul had been stressing how Jews and Gentiles are so far from each, separated by a dividing wall of hostility (2:14).** But now in Christ, through the blood of Christ, people of very diverse (even hostile backgrounds) are reconciled into one body. Jesus creates in himself one new man (a new humanity), so making peace (2:15).

- ❖ And that one new humanity is the Church. Paul's point in chapters 1-3 is that no matter where you come from, no matter your gender, your race, your nationality, your political bent, if you're called to Christ, you're called into unity with his body, the Church.
  - ▶ This sheds light on what Paul means in v3 when he speaks of "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*". He's talking about gospel unity. **About the most foundational bond between two or more individuals – the fact that we stand together in one Spirit, reconciled to and made at peace with one Father, through the atoning sacrifice of one Lord and Savior (2:18).** That's gospel unity.
  
- ❖ This unity is unique. **It's different than the bond you might feel with those who share the same political ideology or a similar passion in sports.** Agreeing on the gospel is not like agreeing on domestic or foreign policy. It's not like agreeing that the Astros are likely to win it all this season. You can agree on these things and feel sense of camaraderie with others. You might feel a connection. But that unity is shallow at best.
  - ▶ **Gospel unity runs deep and touches your very core, your very soul.** The gospel is not just a set of facts you happen to agree on with others. No, it's something, that, if believed, gets internalized deep within your soul and knits you together with likeminded believers in a bond mediated by the Spirit himself.
  
- ❖ *Have you ever experienced that?* You move to a new city, you start a new school or job, and you meet someone for the first time. And this person is totally different from you. Different personalities, different interests, different age, different ethnicity or nationality. **But when you discover the two of you share a common faith in the Lord Jesus, there's this immediate bond.** It's deeper than what you share with non-Christian colleagues who are closer in age or who share more similar interests. That's gospel unity you're experiencing.
  
- ❖ And just as you do not achieve the benefits of the gospel, you do not achieve gospel unity. **Christian unity is not something to be achieved.** We don't have to work on building unity in our church. I think our first instinct, when we sense disunity in the church, is to organize more activities where we can fellowship and socialize and get more vulnerable with each other. We tell ourselves, "That'll build unity."
  - ▶ **But Paul's point in the first half of Ephesians is you already have unity in Christ through the Spirit.** We don't need to achieve unity, but we do need to maintain it. **You don't tell those football players to form a team.** They are one by virtue of the jerseys they've been given. **What you tell them is to start acting like a team.**
  
- ❖ That's what it means to maintain our Christian unity. **We need to start showing the world we're a team, that we're unified.** Because they don't necessarily believe it. The world looks at the Church and has a hard time seeing oneness. They see division. They see us dividing over our theologies; our interpretations; our practices. They don't see unity.
  - ▶ *So what's the solution?* Some would suggest we're too focused on truth and not enough on love. Let's put aside theology and just put on love. Doctrine divides us; love unites us.

- ❖ **But the problem with that thinking is that love between a community of believers that's not firmly planted in truth is like a cut flower removed from its soil.** The love in that church will look pretty in the short term. Go ahead and put it in a vase for all the world to see. But sooner than later it'll wither. That love won't last. That church won't last. Because it's not rooted in theology. It's not nourished and fed by the truth.
  - ▶ **This explains why Paul quickly moves from an exhortation to maintain the unity of the Spirit to unpacking seven essential doctrines that unite all believers.** Look at v4, *“<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*
  
- ❖ Now notice that's not a very long list of doctrines. When you're talking about essentials, it shouldn't be. **Christian unity doesn't require all of us to be in complete agreement on all points of doctrine.** There's a place for legitimate disagreement over non-essential doctrines (I didn't say non-important, just non-essential). We can disagree and still be unified.
  - ▶ Take baptism, for example. **Did you think it was ironic that Paul would include “one baptism” as a unifying truth?** Since so many churches are divided over the issue. But the focus here is not on who can be baptized or how to do it. The focus is on the identification every believer has with the death and resurrection of Christ, which is demonstrated in baptism (Rom. 6:3-4). That's what unites us.
    - What's essential is our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. What's non-essential is the mode of baptism and whether you baptize infants.
  
- ❖ Again, that doesn't mean the non-essentials are unimportant. Our different interpretations and practices are still rooted in our theology. **So unless we're going to say theology doesn't matter, baptism doesn't matter, then we have to accept the fact that, on this side of heaven, organizational unity between all Christians is not going to happen.** Until Jesus returns, we're not going to have one worldwide organized church or denomination.
  - ▶ But that in no way negates our unity. **Christian unity is not predicated on organizational unity.** I'm convinced that fellow believers who are likeminded over non-essentials ought to band together into churches, and likeminded churches are free to band together into denominations.
    - Why try to force organizational unity and spend so much time and energy butting heads over non-essentials? Why distract ourselves from the mission to make disciples with these intramural debates and disagreements?
  
- ❖ Let each church determine where they stand on these matters, and then operate out of those convictions. **But at the same time, let's frequently cross denominational lines and partner with churches different than us – in joint efforts to reach the lost and to work for the shalom of the city we share.** Let's publicly pray for churches in our area, including those that believe and practice things we disagree with. But we love them and pray for their ministry to flourish because, in the end, they're preaching the gospel and making disciples. We're on the same team. This is how we can maintain our unity of the Spirit.

- ❖ There's a popular saying that goes, “**In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.**” So if it's essential to the gospel, let's be unified. If it's non-essential, let's respect each other's freedom of conscience. And in all things, let's be charitable in the way we handle our differences.
  - ▶ I think that's why Paul includes v2. He exhorts us to walk in a worthy manner, "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love*". May these attributes define us. May they define our relationship with other believers and churches, especially those that differ with us in the non-essentials.
- ❖ Let's let the world see our unity. Too often it goes unseen. It remains invisible. Which is why showing humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance is so vital. **They do for Christian unity what electricity does for neon gas.**
  - ▶ Neon gas in its natural state is colorless, odorless, and tasteless. You can't see it. But if you give it an electric charge, it suddenly emits a reddish, orange glow you can't miss. In the same way, when humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance begins to flow in our relationships with other Christians – **our invisible unity in Christ gets charged and it glows brightly for all the world to see.** You can't miss it.

### **Embracing our Christian Diversity**

- ❖ So our Christian unity is gospel reality achieved by Christ, but it's to be maintained and made visible by Christ's followers. **And to that end, we've been given different roles to play and gifts to exercise.** This is our second section about embracing our Christian diversity.
  - ▶ We see this shift of focus in our text. In vv1-6, the focus is on unity in the one church, but now in v7, there's the word "but". "*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*"
- ❖ **So v7 is describing a diversity in the varying measures of grace that Christ has gifted to each believer.** That word for *grace* is the same as found in Ephesians 2:8 where it speaks of saving grace. But it's clear that Paul's not referring to the same thing here since he speaks of a grace given in varying measure. We know saving grace is poured out equally to all the saints. So v7 is talking about serving grace, grace that enables us to serve each other.
  - ▶ So what unifies us as a church is Jesus' **saving grace** poured out in equal measure. But what diversifies us is Jesus' **serving grace** distributed in varying measure. And by that serving grace, we're given different **serving gifts**. We typically call them spiritual gifts, but I prefer to call them serving gifts because that's what they're for.
- ❖ Now if we jump to vv11-12, notice that the gifts Jesus gives the church are not described as particular abilities but particular people – certain people who exercise certain Word-based gifts. "*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers*".
  - ▶ These are four types of Word-based ministers given to the church. Now I won't have the time to go into it, but **I do believe the last two – evangelists and shepherd-teachers (pastors) – are the only ones presently given to the church.** I think there's good biblical reason to suggest the offices of apostle and prophet have expired.

- ❖ But I'm confident that Jesus has given to every church today (ours included) the gifts of evangelists and pastor-teachers. To do what? To do the all the work? All the ministry? **I think too many of us have this impression that the ministry is something best left to the professionals.** To those with seminary training. To those on staff at the church.
  - ▶ Regular Christians can support the ministers. We can give financially. We can serve administratively. But let's leave the spiritual work – the leading, the discipling, the counseling, the evangelizing, the shepherding and teaching – to the professionals.
  
- ❖ But that's not the biblical vision. Look back at v11. Notice how these ministers of the Word are given to the church – not to do all the ministry – but "*to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*"
  - ▶ Let's go back to our Pro Bowl analogy. **Think of these Word ministers as coaches.** Their job is not to play every position while the players sit on the sideline (or in the pews) and just watch. No, the coaches are responsible to teach the players the plays. There's a playbook, and coaches are, in a sense, ministers of the playbook. By teaching and training, they prepare each player to exercise their varying gifts for the playing of the game and the good of the team.
  
- ❖ **Did you realize, that if you're a Christian, Jesus has personally given you a serving gift that you're to use to minister to others?** The pastors, the elders, the small group leaders are not the only ministers in this congregation. If you're in Christ, you too are a minister of God.
  - ▶ You're responsible for the spiritual work of our church – for sharing the gospel, discipling younger believers, reading the Bible with others, praying with others and for others, reaching out to newcomers and new members, etc. That's the work of ministry and it's what you're called to do.
  
- ❖ Now you might be thinking, "That sounds great but I don't know how to do that. I don't know where to start." Don't worry. That's why Jesus gave the church pastor-teachers. We're here to equip you and train you to use your serving gifts to do the work of ministry.
  - ▶ **But do you even know what your serving gifts are?** If you're a Christian, if you're a recipient of Jesus' saving grace, then you've also received his serving grace. You're saved to serve. So you have a serving gift, perhaps more than one.
  
- ❖ **Want to know the best way to identify them?** Start serving. Try out new ministries. Volunteer yourself. Don't wait to be recruited. Take initiative to reach out to others. Look at our board of new members and maybe one of them lives or works near you. Invite them out for a meal. Share God's Word with them and as you serve in his strength, look to see if your service is bearing any fruit in the lives of others.
  - ▶ And listen to the affirmation of others as they recognize and affirm your gifting for this or that work of ministry. Then I believe you'll have a better sense of what serving gifts you've been given.

## Growing our Christian Body

- ❖ **The point Paul is making is that God has given all the saints diverse gifts that we might use them to maintain the unity he's established in us.** To build up the one body of Christ (v12). This leads to our third and final section about growing our Christian body.
  - ▶ Our effort to maintain and to nurture the unity we have in Christ has as its end goal, the growth of the body of Christ into a unified maturity – look at v13 – *"until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"*.
  
- ❖ **One day when we're fully mature, we'll all be in complete agreement in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus, because we'll all see him face to face and learn from him directly.** That'll be the pinnacle of our Christian unity.
  - ▶ But until we reach that day, we need to devote ourselves to the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ, helping each other mature spiritually, until we reach the full measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
  
- ❖ Church, this is not just a concern for pastors and church leaders. **Every Christian among us needs to shift our priorities from the teams on our helmets and to give our primary allegiance and priority to that one team on our jerseys.**
  - ▶ If you've been converted, if you've put off the old self and put on the new in Christ, then you have on that new jersey with CHRISTIAN in bold. That's your team. That's who you play for. **And so your concerns, your priorities, your prayers, should be for the whole team to reach its goal, to reach Christ-like maturity.**
    - We're not playing golf or tennis. We're playing a team sport. So the health and growth and maturity of the believer next to you is your concern and responsibility – as much as it is mine. We're all in this together.
  
- ❖ What this is going to require is a two-front Word-based approach to ministry where, on one hand, you're **speaking truth in love** (v15) but you're also **confronting falsehood in love** (v14). So again we return to the importance of teaching and theology.
  - ▶ The nourishment the body of Christ needed to grow up into spiritual maturity is truth, the Word of God. Look at v15, *"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."* We're so focused on knowing the truth, teaching the truth, speaking the truth, discipling each other in the truth – because it's by the truth we grow.
  
- ❖ **Some would say a church like ours puts too much emphasis on helping people know the truth of God and not enough on helping them know each other.** But I'm convinced that if we channel even more energy into the great and infinite task of knowing God, we'll see and experience an even greater sense of unity between us than we ever thought possible.

- ❖ **A.W. Tozer** made a similar observation, "*Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same pitchfork are automatically tuned to each another? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they possibly could be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.*"
  
- ❖ Church, in all our efforts to maintain the unity of the Spirit, let's be sure to maintain our eyes on Jesus. **If we're all tuned to him, we'll certainly be tuned to each other.**
  - ▶ Let me wrap up with an immediate application as we're about to partake in the communion table. The Lord's Supper is not just a private experience between you and the Lord. It's a corporate affair, hence the name *communion*. **This is one of the clearest expressions of our unity as we share the bread and cup together.** It's like a team huddle before the game where you get all hyped up before you hit the field.
    - Before we part and go back into the world, let's celebrate our unity. Let's get hyped about the unity that Jesus achieved for us in his death and resurrection.
  
- ❖ And for those of you who don't share in that unity, who aren't Christians yet (or you're not sure what you are), let me remind you that an open door lies before you. **There's a way into communion with God and communion with us.** It's not by your own effort. No, the door has already been opened by the hands of grace. The Door's name is Jesus. He's the Way. Come to him. Go through him. He won't refuse you. And you won't be disappointed.