

OUR UNITY INCLUDES DIVERSITY

Ephesians 4.7-10: Unity in diversity requires grace-filled members

Theme: Be filled with God so that your diversity as a member of the Body of Christ can bring unity in the mission of the Body of Christ.

In the first six verses of Ephesians 4, we saw a lot about our unity in the Mission.

- (v1) We have all received a new vocation: (v12) The work of the ministry that edifies the Body of Christ.
- (v2-6) Therefore, we all ought to walk worthy of that vocation: In unity, everyone striving to get along to get the job done.

Today we start a passage that speaks of our diversity in this unity we have: Ephesians 4.7-16.

- I'm reluctant to speak about the theme of this passage: "Diversity in Unity."
 - ✓ Just as so many false converts today use "eternal security" as a license to sin...
 - ✓ There are many carnal believers who would use "diversity" as a license for self-centered worldliness.
 - ✓ Biblical "diversity" has virtually nothing to do with a carnal believer "expressing himself." It is, rather, an "expression" of the Holy Spirit inside each of us for the purpose of the mission.
- Our mission (making disciples) includes many different tasks, and so it requires different kinds of people that can work together even though they're different in many ways.
- That is how a body functions, and that is how the Body of Christ has been designed: **Diversity in unity**.

So, where does it all start? (v7) It starts with a contrast to what we saw last week: "But..."

I. (v7) The Work of Christ in Every Member—Gifts to All

A. "But": The Contrast

1. (v4-6) Paul just spoke very specifically about unity.
2. (v7) But, that does not mean we are all the same. There is (and must be) diversity among the members who have unity by one Spirit and one faith in one Body.

B. (1Cor 12.12) The Body of Christ is one (unity), but the members are many and diverse.

1. (1Cor 12.13) We have all been placed in the same Body and unified (joined together) by the same Spirit.
2. (1Cor 12.14-17) But that does not mean that we are all somehow made into the same "cookie-cutter" Christian. Rather, each member is made different that the others, and that on purpose.
3. (1Cor 12.18) This "diversity in unity" is by God's design. So, let's talk about that...

C. God's Divine Design in Every Member

1. (Eph 4.7) Paul says clearly that "every one of us" has received God's grace—every member of the Body has received God's grace to do the work God has given him to do in the Body.
2. (1Cor 15.10a) Every one of us can say with Paul: *By the grace of God, I am what I am.*
 - a) Part of what Paul "was" had to do with his new birth as a Christian: He received certain spiritual gifts and a work to do in the Mission God gave the Church.

- b) But don't miss this: Part of what Paul “was” (by the grace of God!) also had to do with his life before meeting Christ.
- (1) Paul was a Jew, and God used that aspect of Paul's life and personality in the Mission.
 - (2) Paul was a highly educated theologian (a Pharisee), and God used that in the Mission.
 - (3) Paul was a Greek-speaking Roman citizen, and God used that in the Mission.
 - (4) Paul was single (not married), stubborn, hard-headed, zealous, focused, dedicated...
 - (5) God did not draw some invisible line in Paul's life to say, “This I will use, but not this.”
Rather, God, by His grace, made Paul what he was and used Paul (all of him) as he was.
3. (1Cor 15.10b) And Paul understood that he could best serve the Lord by laboring abundantly according to how God, by His grace, had made him.
- a) Paul focused his efforts according to how God made him (God's divine design in him). Paul says he labored abundantly in the grace that made him what he was.
 - b) Paul did not waste a lot of time trying to be something he wasn't or do something he couldn't.
 - (1) Example: You can develop a skill set with your hands—a skill set that matches the way your hands were made. For example, using a chain saw.
 - (a) With effort, dedication, and practice, you can become pretty efficient using a chainsaw.
 - (b) But, trying to use your feet to do the same job would be a bit counter-productive.
 - (2) And yet, the Body of Christ is full of members who want all the other members to be just like them and do the same thing they have been created in Christ to do.
4. (Rom 12.4-8) Here's my point: Each member is different by God's *divine design*. How so...?
- a) Firstly, your divine design includes your *personality*.
 - (1) (Rom 12.3) Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought, but don't think lower of yourself either. Think soberly—balanced.
 - (2) God does not want everyone in the Body of Christ to be exactly the same, so...
 - (a) Some of you need to stop thinking everyone else should be just like you!
 - (b) Some of you need to stop beating yourselves up because you are not like others that you think “God can use” (and “He could never use me because I'm not like them”).
 - (3) Paul had is “hang-ups” and “personality quirks,” too: (2Cor 11.6) For one, he was “rude in speech,” and for a preacher and teacher that's pretty significant.
 - (a) And just like many of our personality quirks, this part of Paul was developed years before he ever met Christ.
 - (b) And it doesn't look like the new birth totally cured him of it either!
 - (4) So, yes, God is conforming all of us to the image of Christ, but the end result of that transformation process is not “vanilla” (it is not “one flavor for all”; it is, rather, a diversity of people with different personalities... and that's how God wants it!).
 - (a) So, like Paul, labor abundantly to be and make disciples according to your personality.
 - (b) Don't think God can't use you because you're not the “type of person” that's effective in ministry.
 - (c) You are exactly the type of person God can use in the ministry because His grace has made you what you are—He placed you exactly where He wants you in the Body.

b) Secondly, your divine design includes your *passion*. 1Corinthians 12.6

- (1) *Operations*: This term refers to the working of the Spirit in each of us (to move us, motivate us, energize us) to be profitable in the mission (1Cor 12.7).
- (2) We could say it like this: A hand is content and productive doing what a hand should do, but the hand is like a fish out of water trying to do what a foot should do.
- (3) What do you like to do in the ministry? What would you like to do in the ministry? What fires you up and motivates you in the mission of being and making disciples of the Lord?
 - (a) Do that! Focus on that! Get good at doing that! That's probably what you're made for.
 - (b) And stop thinking that everyone else has to be as passionate about your ministry as you are. Let them be passionate about theirs (and don't judge them for it)!
 - (c) But, be passionate about something in the ministry! ("I'm passionate about watching TV" is probably not part of the grace of God given you in Christ.)

c) Thirdly, obviously, your divine design as a unique member of the Body of Christ includes the *gifts and talents* God has given you.

- (1) (Eph 4.7) Those gifts were given to you by the grace of God and by the "gift of Christ."
 - (a) (Rom 5.15-17) This "gift" speaks of all that God gave you freely in the Person and through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - (b) (Rom 8.8-9) This "gift" is Christ—Christ Himself.
 - (c) It is the Spirit of Christ in you that gives you the motivation and the ability to do the work of the ministry you are passionate about—He gives you the gifts you need to do the work He (as the Head of the Body) wants you (a member of the Body) to do.
- (2) (Eph 4.7) Christ works in every member of the Body—no one is excluded, all have received His grace (to make us what we are, to give us the gifts we need).
 - (a) We have unity because the Spirit of Christ is in every one of us, and yet we are at the same time unique and therefore diverse because that is how God designed the Body.
 - (b) Christ has designed and gifted each member to accomplish the work He wants that member to accomplish.
 - i) The "diversity" of the members is not a license to be worldly and live how I want.
 - ii) Our "diversity" exists so that we can be effective in the mission: Evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved. It's about living how God wants us to live.
 - iii) Follow Christ in His design for your life, and work together with the other believers in your church as they do the same. That's how we do the work that God has given us to do—the work of the mission that will glorify God in Christ.
- (3) And this brings us to the next point of study in Ephesians 4:
 - (a) What does our divine design and our "diversity in unity" have to do with vv8-10?
 - (b) (John 16.7) Christ had to leave in order for the Spirit to be sent (the Spirit who makes each unique by God's grace and gifts; the Spirit that unifies all the diverse members).

II. (v8-10a) The Work of Christ for Every Member—The Gifts Made Available

A. (v8) "Wherefore": What we see in verse 7 was made possible by what follows in vv8-10.

1. If Christ did not ascend on high, He would not have given the gifts that He did. And the fact that He ascended on high implies that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth.

2. Notice the grammatical structure of this passage:

- a) Verses 9 and 10 are placed in parenthesis. Verse 8 is Paul's statement/declaration, and then, in the parentheses of verses 9 and 10, he gives an explanation of what he declared.
- b) The point is this: (Acts 1.8-9) For Christ to send the Spirit, He had to ascend; but, when He ascended, He sent the Spirit that unifies all of the diverse members into One Body in order to accomplish One Mission—the mission of being and making disciples of Jesus Christ.

B. When Christ died on the cross, He descended into the lower parts of the earth.

1. (Mat 12.40) When Christ died, He went for three days and three nights to the heart of the earth.
2. (Luke 23.42-43) While on the cross, He told the repentant thief that “today” he would be with Him in paradise.
 - So we know that at that time Paradise was in the lower parts of the earth. Why was that?
3. (Heb 10.4) The blood of animal sacrifices could not take away the sins of the saints.
 - a) The blood of animals was given to “cover” sins until the ultimate sacrifice took them away.
 - b) (Heb 9.12) The ultimate and final sacrifice that takes away sins forever is Christ.
4. The Old Testament saints, then, had to wait for their sins to be taken away.
 - a) God could not bring the Old Testament saints into His presence until their sins were taken away by the work of Christ on the cross.
 - b) These Old Testament saints went to a place called Abraham's Bosom, Paradise in the heart of the earth (a kind of “holding tank” or “waiting room”) where the saints rested until Christ died for them, thus paying the full price for sins (not just “covering” them).

C. After three days in Abraham's Bosom, in the lower parts of the earth, Christ ascended and took with Him the saints who had been held “captive” in Paradise.

1. Paradise is no longer in the heart of the earth; it is now in the third heaven, in the presence of God. We know this because Paul went there, as he describes in 2Corinthians 12.1-4.
 - a) When Christ resurrected, He closed Abraham's Bosom, and now the saints that die are “absent from the body and present with the Lord.” We go “up” not “down” when we die.
 - b) It might also be of benefit to mention in this context that this is exactly what Christ was talking about in Matthew 16.18.
2. (Mat 16.18) The gates of hell did not prevail because Christ took the captives out.
 - a) Hell is Hades (Greek) and Sheol (Hebrew): It is the place where the dead go (or went, as in the case of the Old Testament saints).
 - b) (Acts 2.25-31) Christ died and went to hell (the Paradise side, not the side with flames and torment), and when He resurrected three days later, the gates of hell could not stop Him...
 - (Rev 1.18) ...because Christ got the keys!
 - c) The word “church” does not always refer to the Church, the Body of Christ (e.g., Israel in the wilderness is called a “church” in Acts 7.38, and correctly so).
 - (1) A “church” is simply a “called out group”; it is an assembly of people.
 - (2) The group of Old Testament saints, called out by God and saved by His grace, was the captivity held captive in the Paradise side of hell (Hades/Sheol) and Christ went down there for them—to Paradise (remember: Christ suffered all of God's wrath on the cross).

(3) And after three days and three nights with them, Christ used the keys to open the gates of hell, and He took captivity captive—He took the Old Testament saints—with Him to the third heaven, the presence, of God.

(4) The gates of hell could not prevail against the saints God called out in the Old Testament.

d) Now, hell is only a place for the lost; hell is now only a place of torment in flames for unrepentant sinners. Christ “closed” Abraham's Bosom when He rose from dead.

D. Review: Christ did a work *for* us and then, because of that, He did a work *in* us.

1. Christ's work *for* us: (Eph 4.8-10) His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension on high. Christ's ascending resulted in the Spirit's descending, to every member.
2. Christ's work *in* us: (Eph 4.7) God's grace and gifts make every member unique, and His Spirit makes all the diverse members one (unity with diversity; diversity in unity).
3. And this brings us to our conclusion and application...

Conclusion: (v10b) The Work of Christ *through* Every Member—The Gifts in Action

God's purpose in all of this is: (Eph 4.10b) To fill all things.

- God, in eternity future, will fill all of creation.
 - ✓ He will again “clothe” Himself with the heavens as with a garment and thus fill the universe with His presence and light (see: Rev 22.1-5).
- But today He wants to fill *us*.
 - ✓ (Eph 3.19) He wants us to be filled with His fullness—all of Him!
 - ✓ (Eph 5.18) He wants us to be filled with His Spirit!
 - ✓ (Col 3.16) That means He wants us to be filled with His Word (because that is how the Spirit guides us and controls us—as a hand fills a glove and controls it according to the will of the head).

Christ has made you unique in the Body of Christ and he has done so with a purpose:

- Purpose: Accomplish the mission the Head has given the Body, the mission of making disciples.
- The way to function in unity is to be *filled* with God (His Spirit and His Word).
- When we allow the Spirit to control us by leading us with Scripture, we will find ourselves working together (we'll see the “unity with diversity” and “diversity in unity” common in a body).
- This way each member does what God designed him to do, and all members work together to get the common job done.

You are what you are (personality, passion, gifts, and talents) by the grace of God.

- So, fill yourself with Scripture and follow what it says!
- Labor abundantly in the mission that we all share (for there is our unity: in the same mission)!
- But labor according to how God, by His grace, has made you (unique; our diversity in the same Body)!
- This is the key to effective ministry: Each member doing what he is designed to do in the Mission.

Theme: Be filled with God so that your diversity as a member of the Body of Christ can bring unity in the mission of the Body of Christ.