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THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

STUDY 5 UNITY & DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

Ephesians 4:1-16.

In chapters 1 to 3 of Ephesians Paul speaks of the blessings and implications of the salvation we have in Christ. In chapters 4 to 6 Paul he speaks of the blessings and implications of being member of the community of salvation and the demands and challenges of living as a Christian in a fallen world.

Verses 1-2: Paul begins with an exhortation. Live like a Christian.

Q. 1. In these words Paul gives a short summary of important practical outcomes that should follow from salvation in Christ? What could be possibly added to this list? What do you think is the most important Christian virtue to be put into practice?

Verses 3-6: Turning to their communal life Paul first of all stresses the unity they have in Christ, a unity that has to be realised. It is a gift yet something they must work to achieve.

Q. 2. What things unite them and what must they do to maintain unity?

Q. 3. Why is church disunity so common? List some of the things that divide us as Christians and the things that unite us? What can we do about it?

Verses 7-16: As in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul teaches that Christians collectively constitute a community described as 'the body of Christ.' This metaphor highlights unity. However, here and in Corinthians Paul immediately goes on to speak of the diverse ministries in this one body. What Paul adds in Ephesians, written about ten years later, is that the diversely-gifted church leaders' main responsibility is to equip other believers for their ministry and that the goal of all ministry is the spiritual maturity of the whole church and its unity.

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In verses 7-9 Paul says that when Christ ascended into heaven he gave 'grace' (verse 7) or 'gifts' (verse 11) to each believer. A 'gift of grace' or simply a 'gift' in this context and in 1 Corinthians refers to a given ministry. A practical outworking of grace, a charisma, or spiritual gift. In 1 Cor. 12:7 Paul says that to each member of the body of Christ a ministry is given by the Spirit.

Q. 4. What do you think of the idea that each of us has been given at least one ministry? Would you like to hear more on this said in your church?

Q. 5. What do you think is your gift of ministry? What do you think is the special gift given to each of the other members of your study group? Focusing on one person at a time in the group let people suggest the gifts(s) they see in each person present and ask the person themselves to say what they think is their gift/ministry.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul emphasises the ministry of each believer, only mentioning in passing right at the end (verse 28) the leaders called apostles, prophets and teachers. In Ephesians chapter 4 Paul focuses mainly on the leaders emphasising their main ministry is to equip and empower all believers for their ministry.

In 1 Corinthian's Paul names the church leaders, apostles (missionaries that founded churches – the 12 apostles were an inner core of much larger group called apostles), prophets who spoke as the Lord gave them something to share and teachers who expounded the Bible. In Ephesians Paul adds evangelists (people who worked at building up the local church through evangelism) and he speaks of the teachers as teachers and pastors (the title pastor could equally well be translated 'shepherd').

What this list of leaders, all in the plural, brings to our attention is that how we organise the church today as an institution is very different to New Testament times. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find one person in charge of a local church. All leadership was plural and it involved men and women. Women were missionary apostles (Rom 16:7); prophets (Acts 21:9, 1 Cor. 11:5, Rev. 2:20), house church leaders (Acts 12:12, Col. 4:15) and they taught (Acts 19:24-26).

Q. 6 There is no sin in the church changing the way it is lead as the outward and historical form of the church changes but would our churches today be healthier if more people were involved in the leadership of the congregation?

Q. 7. Is it realistic to think that one or two people in any church can be good missionaries, prophets, evangelists, and teachers with pastoral responsibilities? Why not?

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In verses 12-13 Paul says the work of all these leaders is to equip every member of the church (the saints) for their ministry. The goal of their work being the building up of the body of Christ, the unity of the church and the full maturity of every believer.

Q. 8. *I have heard it said that in so many of our churches it is assumed, 'ministers minister and congregations congregate'. What do you think Paul would say of such an idea? What problems does it raise?*

Q. 9. *What are the signs of a mature Christian?*

Q. 10. *In verse 14 what is an indication of a lack of maturity in Christ?*

Q. 11. *What does Paul suggest in verse 15 promotes Christian maturity? What is involved in 'speaking the truth in love?' In the past this text may have been used to justify unkind words from one Christian to another. Do these words of Paul support such behaviour?*

Q. 12. *Explain what Paul is saying in verses 15b-16? You may like to use pencil and paper to draw or sketch what comes to your mind when you read these verses and you think of your own church.*

Q. 13. *What have you learned from this passage? A number of people in the group may like to respond to this question.*

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