

Diversity – Ephesians 4.8-10

REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION:

Having looked at the idea of unity in the family last week in vss 4-6. I said that we are one body, we rely on one hope, we believe in one Lord Jesus, and we have one baptism – even as God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one.

Our unity is to be like the unity of the godhead. God is ONE Spirit, ONE Lord (Jesus), and ONE Father. We, God's people, are ONE body, hope, faith, and baptism. The Holy Trinity's unity is the template for our unity. Our unity either is an analogy of the Holy Trinity – or it is a perversion of it.

To put it another way: we are unified in Christ if we are in Christ at all. If we are not unified in this one body and growing in this unity: one hope, one faith, one baptism; then we are not in Christ at all.

Now we look at the idea of diversity in the family today from vss 7-10. And we'll look at diversity under 4 headings

- Source Of Diversity
- Recipients Of Diversity
- Kinds Of Diversity
- Purpose For Diversity

SOURCE OF DIVERSITY:

First of all, the source of the diversity in the body of Christ is Jesus Himself, he *gave gifts to men ...*¹ And this diversity is considered an immeasurable grace, a grace with a value as great as Christ Jesus' gift of himself - *according to the measure of Christ's gift.*²

The image in vss 8-10 helps us see this. The image is that of a Roman *triumphus* – a religious and public ceremony “that celebrated ... the achievements of an army commander who had won great military successes.”³ The *triumphus* was procession of the conquered and all sorts of booty, led by the conqueror through the city of Rome.

So the image here is that of conquering commander Jesus bringing his captives and parading them before his emperor Father. But instead of presenting his captives for the purpose of execution, the triumphant Son says: “Look, Father, at what I have captured! Here is the booty I have won! And wait until you see how well I treat them! I've going to set them free and give them all kinds of gifts!”

¹ Eph 4.8 & 11

² Citation from Eph 4.7. Proof that Christ Himself is the gift in view, see Joh 4.10, Rom 3.24, 5.15-17, and 6.23.

³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_triumph

Diversity in the body of Christ – in the family of the church and in our nuclear families – is a gift from Jesus himself.

RECIPIENTS OF DIVERSITY:

Notice 2ndly that the recipients of this diversity are every Christian. *Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*⁴

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, he has given you gifts. Let no one say that they have nothing or are nothing. It's not the approval of others that defines your value, but rather the giver of those gifts.

I love Paul's perspective.

*I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain.*⁵

Does that sound arrogant to you – *His grace toward me did not prove vain?* That's not arrogance. That's confidence in the one who has gifted him. I love that kind of confidence that enables him to say: *I am ... not fit to be called an apostle* (in myself, I'm nothing and less than nothing) *... but by the grace of God I am what I am* (but in Christ, I am a gifted man). Jesus is the giver of good gifts, therefore there is no other who can define your value for you!

We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days.

KINDS OF DIVERSITY:

Thirdly, there are different kinds of diversity. I can count at least 3 kinds in Ephesians.

Diversity Of Strengths: Not everyone has the same kinds of gifts.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the

⁴ Eph 4.7

⁵ 1Co 15.9-10

*one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*⁶

There are some at St. John's from whom you rarely hear. But let them stop serving and your children would have not church, your SS teachers would have no curriculum, shut-ins would not be visited, praying would not happen, small bits of encouragement and support wouldn't be taking place.

Some see the "big picture" very well, but have a hard time tracking individuals tasks or people. Others can seem to lose sight of the forest for the many trees, but individuals never fall through the cracks for them. Some evangelize well – they're full of stories about how someone asked them about their faith recently. Others rarely find that these things happen, but oh the hours they're willing to spend with one person, who seems so broken and hurting that there's no apparent way out of their problems.

And consider the family. Husbands, what gifts do you bring to your family – or what gifts have you failed to recognize in your wife? Wives, what about you? Children, what about you?

Diversity Of Responsibility/Authority: There is also a diversity of responsibility and authority. All the rest of Ephesians points to this reality. Prophets were great, but the apostles were more privileged. Now there are evangelists and pastor/teachers who serve God with authority, but also with greater responsibility, because they'll give an answer to God for the souls put in their care. Wives are to be subject to their husbands, but husbands will answer to God for their wives. Children ought to obey their parents, but their parents will answer to God for their children. Employees ought to serve their employers as if Jesus Himself was their boss, but employers will answer to God for their employees. Citizens are subject to governing authorities, Paul says in Rom 13, but those authorities will stand judged by God for their deeds.

And notice something: this is considered a gift! Diversity of roles is no burden. They are God's order for our own well being. To treat our submission as a burden is to treat God's gifts with disdain. And to treat our roles of authority and responsibility as a God-given right to be authoritarian or demeaning is to turn God's gift into a disease. Abuse of submission or authority is to thumb our noses at God's goodness, to call his grace a burden, and his kindness cruelty or foolishness.

Diversity Of Maturity: Finally, there is a diversity of maturity. For a time, I had an executive coach working with me. One of the things he pointed out was that it's customary for us to make others wrong so that we can be right. Failing to recognize that there is a diversity of maturity often looks exactly like that. "Can you believe how dumb they were when they said that?" "How could he treat his wife like that?" "How could she let her children get away with that?"

Notice these phrases in Eph 4:

- *we all attain to ... mature manhood (13)*

⁶ Rom 12.3-8

- so that we may no longer be children **(14)**
- speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up **(15)**

As with any family, there are varying levels of maturity. John has a great passage in his 1st letter on this:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.⁷

PURPOSE FOR DIVERSITY:

Finally, notice that the purpose for diversity in the nuclear family and the family of the church is – drum roll – unity.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith.⁸

Since we'll be looking at these vss more closely in the near future, just allow a few short comments on this point.

I said last week that in the same way that unity is essential to the Holy Trinity, so unity is essential for us in our marriages, with our children, and between us, as brothers and sisters. Unity is not something you practice if you feel like it, or if you feel moved by the Spirit, or if you have a sense of peace about it, or after you pray about it.

If you called as a follower of Christ – you must walk this way. If you don't walk this way and are not increasingly in this kind of worthy walk, you are not a follower of Christ.

If there is one thing that I hear most commonly is missing in the body of Christ: whether St. John's or anywhere else, it is this one thing: authentic community. Do you see that the many gifts, talents, skills, roles, responsibilities, authorities of the nuclear family and the family of the church – these are meant to be creating exactly that: authentic community.

Parenting is not a hobby that you do at your convenience. Neither is being part of the local body of Christ. Authentic community as believers, what some have called the tangible kingdom of God, and others call incarnational living, is worked out among us, because we are committed to a unity in which diversity is expressed. And we are likewise committed to expressing our diversity so that it leads to a unity of purpose, maturity, and godly love.

This authentic community of believers is exactly what Paul has in mind when he writes:

⁷ 1Jo 2.12-14

⁸ Eph 4.11-13

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.⁹

Husbands, you should be able to turn to your wives and say: “Your differences are a gift to me and I thank God for them!” Wives, you should be able to turn to your husbands and say: “You are not at all like I am, and I thank God for that.” Parents / children. Church members, turning to each other, “You are not at all like I am, and you are a gift to me! I thank God for you!”

⁹ Eph 4.15-16