

Recall & React – Walk in Unity (Part 2)

Ephesians 4:1-16

Did you know there are 11 different systems in your body that are performing unique functions at this very moment? You've got the circulatory system, which moves blood carrying oxygen around your body. The digestive system absorbs nutrients from food and carries away waste. Your immune system defends your body against harmful pathogens that endanger your body. The muscular system allows your body to move using muscles. Your nervous system collects and processes information through your nerves and brain. Of course, there are several other systems in place and the amazing thing is that these systems work together in such complete harmony most of the time that we don't even notice they are distinct systems.

But, beyond the 11 systems, each of those systems is made up of smaller organs and tissues that perform a unique function within their system. For example, the muscular system is made up of 650 different muscles, each working to move the different parts of your body. Those muscles most coordinate with your nervous system, your respiratory system, and several other systems just to cause movement. Just think through the organization it takes to lift that cup of coffee to your lips and drink it and all the different systems of your body that must be involved to make sure you don't dump hot coffee on your lap. It's profoundly amazing and really a beautiful symphony that testifies to God's wisdom.

The body makes a fantastic picture of what the church should be and that's why Paul uses it over and over again. We've already seen this picture hinted at by Paul in chapter 2 when he calls the church a 'new man' and speaks of the growth of the church. But now, in verses 7-16 he's going to really bring this image of the unified church as a body to the forefront. As he does this he's going to combine the image of the body with the image of each believer being given a gift to be used in the body.

So, think of verses 7-16 like this. The church is a body and each part must perform its function and role for the body to grow and move and do what it has been called to do. Each part of the body receives its role or function as a gift of grace from God. Just like a human body has many parts with different important roles,

the church has a diversity of members, each with a different gift given to serve and support the body as it grows to maturity.

Verses 7-16 are part of this larger section of verses 1-6 in chapter 4 and here's the message we are seeing in this section. **3 Practices to Pursue Unity as Christ's Body.**

1. Grow in Virtue and Love (vv. 1-3)

Look back with me to verse 1. This entire section is based on the doctrine or clear teaching regarding our calling in chapters 1-3. Because we are "in Christ" we live suitably to that calling. That means growing in particular virtues, or character qualities, and growing in love. We bear with one another in patience and love because God has been patient and gracious with us. We are eager to maintain unity according to verse 3. Of course, we are eager to maintain unity because we know what we have in common.

2. Remember our Common Faith (vv. 4-6)

In verses 4-6 Paul lays out 7 "ones" that we share as members of Christ's body. Our unity with one another is based on the unity of the Triune God as Father, Son, and Spirit love and fellowship with one another and then invite us, together, into that loving communion. That's what it means to know God and entering that loving communion is the ultimate goal of our salvation. So, we ought to spend much time focusing on the things that bind us together, which are given in verses 4-6.

Now we turn to verses 7-16 and here's our third practice to pursue unity as Christ's body.

3. Cultivate Christ's Gifts of Ministry (vv. 7-16)

Up to this point in chapter 4 Paul has been urging us to focus on what we have in common and the virtues that will bring us together. He's going to continue to do that but now he's going to explain that within the unity of the body there is great diversity. And recognizing that we all bring unique gifts to the table and cultivating those gifts will cause the body of Christ to function in more unity, not less. Look at verse 7. This is sort of the summary or theme of the entire section.

I want you to notice here that Paul is speaking here of “each one of us”. Rather than talking about the entire body, he’s now focusing on what each individual person brings to the table. Each person who is “in Christ” has received a gift of grace according to verse 7. And this gift of grace has been given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Romans 12:3-6a explains this for us.

Paul makes it very clear in Romans 12 as well as Ephesians 4 that you and I were given whatever gifts we have. If you find yourself serving effectively in the church and people respond that service and appreciate it, God has designed you to function in that way. But here’s the other side of that. If you are currently not serving in any capacity in the church body, then you are missing out on the gift of grace that God has given you. Look again at Romans 12:6. We are a body and each part of the body needs to perform its function if the body is to work properly.

Now, I understand that it can be hard to figure out exactly where you fit and what gift you have been given to serve the body. I’ll just say if that is you, please come talk to one of the elders, come talk to me. We want to help you find your gift and exercise it because as you’ll see later in this passage, that is part of our gifting and role in the body.

So, verse 7 functions as a summary of the passage here and makes it clear that Christ gives gifts to his body. But what right does Jesus have to give gifts to people? Well, you might think, he’s God, of course He has the right. That’s true in one sense, but keep in mind that we were all born into the world in the state described in Ephesians 2:1-3. Let me remind you of that. So, Jesus has to earn the right to give these gifts of grace to people. How did He earn that right? That’s what Paul is going to explain in verses 8-10.

You can see verse 8 begins with the word “therefore” and then Paul gives a quote from the OT. Paul is saying that this quote provides the basis or foundation for Jesus earning the right to give gifts to people. Let’s read verse 8.

Now, this quote comes from Psalm 68 and if Paul is saying this proves that Jesus has earned the right to give gifts to men, then we need to understand what is happening in Psalm 68. So, turn back there with me and we’re going to look at this briefly.

What you've got in this Psalm is a Psalm describing God's victory over his enemies. Look at verses 1-3. God winning the victory over his enemies is great, but this Psalm describes this victory in a particular way. Look at verse 4 and then down to verse 7. This psalm is describing God's movement from Egypt and through the wilderness in front of his people. This procession stopped at Mt. Sinai where God gave the law to His people. Look at verse 8. But God's military procession didn't stop at Mt. Sinai. After Sinai God moved in front of his people and continued to win military victories on their behalf and triumph over his enemies.

But the entire procession from Egypt had an ultimate destination. God never planned on dwelling on Mt. Sinai forever. He had another mountain in mind, and he was leading his people toward that mountain and triumphing over his enemies on his way. In fact, this Psalm presents Mt. Sinai as looking on this other mountain with jealousy because it would be God's dwelling place. Look at verse 16. Where is this other mountain that God will choose for His dwelling place?

Look at verse 17 as God moves from Sinai toward this other mountain. And here's the verse Paul quotes in verse 18. God wins the victory over his enemies and triumphs over them and receives gifts from men. So, where is this other mountain? Look at verses 28-29. Of course, it's ultimately Jerusalem where the temple will be built, and God will dwell among His people.

But, go back to verse 18 and this is key. Who are the captives here? Well, there's a key verse back in Numbers 18:6 that describes God setting apart the Levites to serve in his sanctuary. He has taken them from among men and given them as gifts to the nation of Israel to serve in God's dwelling place.

So, what Psalm 68 is describing is God moving from Egypt to Jerusalem and winning the victories over his enemies. While this procession is taking place he sets aside men from among his people, his captives, and gives them as gifts to his people to serve them and Him.

What does this have to do with the foundation for Jesus giving gifts to the church? Psalm 68 ends by looking forward to the day when God will reign the entire world from his holy mountain in Jerusalem. The procession from Egypt to Sinai and to Jerusalem is preparing for that day. Paul sees Christ's work as the fulfillment of the hope of Psalm 68.

Go back to Ephesians 4 and look at verses 9-10. Paul focuses on the word ascend from Psalm 68. In verses 9-10 here he is describing Jesus descended to earth in his incarnation and then going on a victory procession in front of his people, winning the victory over his enemies and ultimately coming to the heavenly sanctuary in heaven as the victorious king. He ascended to heaven and now fills all things. This simply means that he is the victorious sovereign king and has won the right to rule over all. It's the same idea as Philippians 2 where he humbled himself and now every knee will bow before him.

So, Paul is saying that Christ has slaughtered his enemies before Him and won a great victory through His death. And his ascension to the Father has finalized his sovereign reign and ability to give gifts. So, what are these gifts? Look at verse 11 for some important examples of these gifts. This verse does not exhaust the gifts given, but these are foundational gifts, given so that the rest of the body may learn to exercise their gifts. The gifts here are people! Redeemed from death, like the Levites in the OT, and set apart for God's use. We are the captives, rescued from death and given grace by our rescuer!

First, we find the two foundational groups given to the church, apostles and prophets. We've already seen these two mentioned together in Ephesians 2:19-20. An Apostle was one sent by God and officially commissioned by him. They served as the foundation of the church. The prophets were those who spoke the word of God and communicated divine revelation to people, often before that revelation was even written down.

Second, evangelists are those who do pioneering work with the gospel. They reach new areas and new people and see the church grow numerically as new souls are saved.

Finally, we have pastors and teachers. It's best here to see these as one group with two functions. This is the group we are most familiar with. The word pastor carries the idea of a shepherd. A shepherd cares for the church through leadership and oversight and through pastoral care. A teacher communicates apostolic doctrine in an authoritative way. Think about the difference between the way Jesus taught and the way the scribes taught. Jesus taught as one having authority and this is what teaching looks like in the NT. Of course, NT teaching is

always based on God's given revelation. Teaching happens as God's revelation is explained.

So, I would describe NT teaching this way. Authoritative explanation for the goal of moral transformation. Teaching is not just concerned with the facts of the Bible. The system of apostolic doctrine is taught with the goal of seeing people changed into the image of Christ.

So, let me bring all this together. We are talking about 3 practices to pursue unity as Christ's body. The third practice is that we would Cultivate Christ's gifts of Ministry. You can see in verse 7 that Christ has, by His grace, given a diversity of gifts to us. Verses 8-10 tell us that Christ has won a great victory over darkness and sin and death by coming to earth as a man, dying, rising, and ascending to the Father in victory. He's won the right to save men and endow them with gifts of grace. We see examples of those gifts in verse 11, but what do these people use their gifts for?

Let's make this very practical for us this morning. I serve as a pastor-teacher along with the other elders. What are we supposed to be doing? What is our role? How do we exercise our gifts, given by God according to His measure? Look at the beginning of verse 12.

It's possible to get this idea that pastors do ministry and the rest of the body receives the ministry done. It's possible to think that the paid staff or the elders are the ones who really do church work and the rest of us just attend. But Paul says to truly have unity in the body we have to understand how these systems work together. God has given pastors to exercise their gifts in order to equip the saints. Think of a soldier being equipped with all the armor, weapons, and supplies he needs to be adequately ready for battle.

The saints, all of us, do the work of ministry. If you are a believer in Christ this morning you have been gifted for ministry. And God has given you church leadership to help you cultivate and exercise that gift. There's a lot more to go in this passage that will help us see what this looks like, but let me end this morning by asking you a couple of questions.

What is your gifting to serve the body? If you don't know it, what are you going to do to discover it? If you aren't currently exercising your gift in the body, why not?

Are you letting the leadership of the church equip you to use your gift in the best way possible? Some people come into churches and demand to participate in certain ways. They don't really want to let leadership equip them to serve, they just want to build their own kingdom for self-advancement and self-edification. Are you letting others in the body serve you with their gifts? Or, are you isolating yourself from those around you and only coming into contact in minimal ways?

The opportunities are great, the gifts have been given by God with great liberality. Let's exercise them for His glory and our good.

Small Group Discussion Questions

12/8/19

- Why is the human body such a great picture of the way the church works?
- What is the relationship between verses 1-6 and verses 7-16? In other words, how do these two sections fit together?
- In what sense does Jesus Christ have to earn the right to give gifts to people?
- What OT passage is verse 8 a quote from?
- What is Psalm 68 mainly about?
- Who are the captives in Psalm 68:18?
- Describe what it means in Ephesians 4:9-10 that Christ descended and then ascended. How does this enable Him to give gifts?
- Is verse 11 an exhaustive list of gifts given from Christ to the church?
- How do the people who have the gifts mentioned in verse 11 relate to the rest of the gifts that Christ gives?
- In what way are you personally gifted to serve the body of Christ? In what ways are those around you gifted to serve the body?

- What role do pastors and elders play in helping you utilize your gifts to serve the body?