

God's New Society

Message 7

The Goal of God's New Society

Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction

What's the quickest way to make friends in a new neighborhood? Walk down the sidewalk with a baby stroller. Everyone loves a baby. Grandmothers may not cross the street to talk to you, but they will go out of their way to admire a baby. Babies are adorable, but they grow up. They have to. What would it be like if a person remained a baby all his life? The cuteness would soon wear off. Soon the weariness of changing poopy diapers would overcome the pleasure of coos of delight. Some people do not grow up. They are mentally handicapped and remain functional three or four-year-olds. Most such people are rewarding in their own way, but everyone agrees they are abnormal. There is a human potential which tragically goes to waste.

Ironically, while we can see easily that even the cutest babies must grow up, we often have difficulty recognizing the necessity of Christian maturity. Many Christians never grow much in their faith, and some believers act as though new believers are more spiritual than seasoned Christians. New believers can be refreshing, but nothing can replace real experience with God. Think of human relationships. A new love is exhilarating, but it is a shallow relationship. Only time and experience can develop a truly deep friendship. It is that way in our relationship with God, too. God's desire is that we know Him as mature men and women, not babies or immature lovers.

Worthy of Our Calling

As we press on in our study of Ephesians, let's take a minute to get our bearings. Like most of Paul's letters, Ephesians is a two-part book. Chapters one to three are about how God saved us. These chapters are the theology section. Chapters four to six are about how our salvation works in practice. These are the application section.

Paul begins this application section by telling us that we must live in a manner worthy of our salvation. (4:1) Whenever there is an incongruity between someone's position and his behavior we are scandalized. A baby can throw his food around, and we do not like it, but we accept it as part of the learning process of a small person. But if a parent threw his food around in the course of a meal, we would be shocked. It is sinful for teenagers to engage in sex with each other, but it is scandalous when a teacher seduces a pupil – as we have read so much in the news lately. There are many greedy businessmen out there, and greed is wrong – but we are more angry when a minister grows rich off the ministry. So far Paul has told us that we occupy the most lofty position in the human race. The lowliest Christian is more exalted than the most majestic unbeliever. In chapters one to three Paul has told us that we are now children of God, purchased with Jesus' blood, sealed by the Holy Spirit, alive in Christ, seated with Jesus in the heavenlies, God's work, fellow citizens in God's Kingdom, members of God's household, a holy temple, joint heirs of God's promises – and more. This is who we are. This is our identity. So we are expected to *act* like children of God, rulers with Christ, a holy temple, etc. When we do not act like children of God, rulers with Christ, a holy temple, etc. the whole world is scandalized. Everyone recognizes that followers of Christ must be radically different from everyone else. This is true even of unbelievers. Unbelievers do not believe in Christ, and have no desire to live like Him, but they know that there is something dreadfully wrong when those who claim allegiance to Christ live like them.

The rest of Ephesians develops this topic of Christian living. Tonight's passage lays a foundation for the rest of the book by addressing Christian unity, Christian ministry, and Christian maturity.

Unity, True and False

unity – like Mom, apple pie and the flag – is praised by everyone
the question is how to get it

false forms

activity - Bible distribution

emotional - warm feeling with other believers, e.g. Mercer students

experiential - said the sinner's prayer

- confirmed by bishop

- e.g. 2 blind men: John 9 (with spit, clay, and wash in pool of Siloam); Mark 8 by word¹

organizational - church mergers

doctrinal - on minor points

heritage - ethnic or other heritage

some truth in all these, but alone they do not constitute Christian unity

true unity

spiritual

created by the Spirit

maintained by the Spirit

in the Spirit (cf. in the heavenlies, in Christ)

of body (church)

not merely organizational, like a machine

not amorphous either, like slime mold

organic unity - a living structure

of hope (future)

not focused on details of millennium, tribulation, etc.

such focus is unbiblical

focused on the return of Christ in victory

of Lord (master)

1 Cor. 12:3

we all get our teaching and orders from the same source

of faith (doctrine)

those matters taught by the apostles – creeds and confessions of the church

e.g. mode of baptism not essential

teaching is essential

activity, emotion, experience, and organization do not display unity apart from doctrinal agreement

growth in unity requires growth in doctrinal understanding

of baptism (trinitarian, with water)

key idea is identity with Christ

Baptists are misguided in insisting on their own method

of Father

makes us all His children

true unity in practice

1. trinitarian: rooted in the Father, foundation in the Son, created by the Spirit
2. centered in the church: a living structure
3. sound doctrine as its core

¹ Boice p. 130.

4. manifested in organization, emotion, activity
5. accommodates diversity

how is unity to be maintained? by good leaders

Leadership, Right and Wrong

two errors:

clericalism

“The members of the church have no other duty than (to quote the 1906 Papal Encyclical *Vehementer Nos*) ‘[of] letting themselves be led, and of following their pastors as a docile flock.’”²

- lazy people, selfishly ambitious leaders

egalitarianism

- lazy leaders, selfishly ambitious people

God has constructed man to live in a structured community

leaders serve the people by equipping them to do ministry

people learn from their leaders and are active in ministry

two eras

apostles and prophets - part of the foundation of the church (2:20)

not present to day

evangelists, pastor-teachers - the ongoing leadership roles

bring to faith, lead to maturity

evangelists spread the church, as the apostles

pastor-teachers strengthen the church, as the prophets

both evangelists and pastor-teachers preach and teach the apostolic message

purpose of Christian leaders: equip believers to do ministry so the church is strengthened (v. 12)

not to do the ministry themselves

not merely to teach

but teach so that people are given the knowledge and skills to minister to each other

two people have approached me about evangelism: an event, and contact

I hope to help them accomplish these goals

I do not need to do the work

they should seek advice and help

together the church grows stronger

The Goal of Salvation

maturity

“the perfect man” (v. 13)

“the fulness of Christ” (v. 13)

“no longer children” (v. 14)

many do not want a mature church. Why not?

leaders feel important if people are dependent on them

people enjoy being irresponsible

² Boice p. 140.

we live in an immature society

is there a mature person in “Desperate Housewives”? the soaps? anywhere on TV?

sports and entertainment figures behave like spoiled children

maturity is the key to unity

if you long for unity among believers, the way to accomplish that is to seek maturity for yourself and those around you

Conclusion

do you wish to be mature, or do you prefer immaturity?

are you looking forward to growing up, or do you like being a child?

are you seeking responsibility, or avoiding it?

when you go home, do you take responsibility, or do you let your parents do all the work?

does your life look like a child of God, purchased with Jesus’ blood, sealed by the Holy Spirit, alive in

Christ, seated with Jesus in the heavenlies, God’s work, fellow citizens in God’s Kingdom, members of God’s household, a holy temple, joint heirs of God’s promises?

if not, why not?

are you lazy?

a life hanging out until Jesus comes is scandalous

repent

seek help from your pastor (me)

look for ways to strengthen the church, starting by serving the people around you

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