

“Ephesians and You - A New Walk”

The Family of God

Ephesians 4:7-12

Dr. Jeff Stivason

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Jeff: Well, good morning. It's good to be with you again. And I'm glad to be here leading this study with you this morning. Again it goes without saying that I miss being with you and I hope that's the case with you. So we'll look forward at some point to being together. Until then hopefully these Bible studies will be helpful to you.

Just a word of thanks for praying for me. I was out running with my dog a couple of weeks ago. And the dog pulled my legs out from under me and I went sailing through the air. And a few things struck me as I was flying through the air. The first was that I couldn't see my feet. And the second was that I'm too old to fall like this, and I was right. I ended up with a concussion out of it. I'm having good days and bad days and the last few days have been pretty good. So continue to pray for me; I appreciate it. And we'll look forward to seeing you again sometime in the future.

What I want us to do is that I want us to pray, and then I'll read the portion of text that we're going to look at today. And then I'll give a recap of where we've been so that you can contextualize it; it's been a couple of weeks. Then we'll head into our lesson. So let's pray together.

Our gracious and merciful God, we are thankful for this day, for the way in which you've shown us mercy time and again through the Lord Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. Father, we certainly pray not only for our individual well-being, but we also pray for the collective well-being of our nation, indeed for our world. We pray that You would vanquish this virus from the creation. We know that You're more than able to do that. And yet we also know that You are teaching us. So while the virus is amongst us we pray that You'll teach us valuable spiritual lessons for our good. And Father, we pray and ask that You would be with us in our study. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Well, just a word about where we are. First of all, maybe I'll read the text. So we're in Ephesians chapter 4. And I'm going to start today from verse 7 and read down to verse 12. This is the word of the living God.

*“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says,
'When He ascended on high
He led a host of captives,
And He gave gifts to men.'*

“In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

Well there's a lot there. But first of all let me recap and remind you of where we've been. First of all, in its broadest sense, we have been in the first three chapters of the

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book of Ephesians. And when you think about that you think about how that particular portion of the book of Ephesians is about the indicatives, what God has done for us. Now we're in the latter portion of the book, chapters 4, 5 and 6. And these chapters are about the imperatives. They tell us what we are to do.

And so it follows a very federal or covenantal scheme. For instance, when God says to the people of the Old Testament as well as to the New, “I will be your God and you will be My people,” the first three chapters tell us how it is that God has been our God, what He has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and how He has opened our eyes to that work in the power of the Spirit. And then the latter part of the phrase, “and you will be My people,” is encapsulated in these last three chapters. In other words, “these are the things that you will do as you are My people.” So it's covenantal.

And it's a wonderful book for thinking that way. All of the gospel is built on that fundamental grammar of indicatives and imperatives. The book of Ephesians is explicitly and pervasively built in that way. It's a really wonderful thing.

Now when you come to chapter 4, one of the things that you realize is this. You realize that we're being told something that's fundamental. Jesus Christ is our Head. He has been made Head for the sake of the church. That's been already described for us in the first three chapters.

But there's something interesting. And that is that we grow up into the Lord Jesus Christ. And you remember how I gave the example of the baby's head, and how the baby's head is 40% of its adult size as an infant. And by the time it's, I don't know, seven or eight years old that child has 90% of his head capacity. And so there's a sense in which the child is growing up into its head.

And I said to you the last time we were together that the Christian church is like that. It's the body of Christ, and it's growing up into its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I said to you that it grows in a certain way. And for that I gave the example, several examples.

I gave the example of the orthodontist. And that word means “straight tooth.” I gave the example of the AFO's, the angle foot brace, and how this orthotic brace provides a rule by which the limb can grow up straight. So there are orthopedics, the idea of straight bones.

And then there's the idea of orthodoxy. And orthodoxy means “straight praise,” or “right praise.” And so there's a certain sense in which orthodoxy or orthodox belief provides the structure, the rule, the guidance for right praise.

And so there's a sense in which God has not left us to ourselves. I mean, we don't get all of these benefits that are in Christ, and then God says to us, “Well, that's wonderful. I'm glad to give these things to you. Now go your own way and do whatever you want to do and have My blessing.” That's not the way it is at all. It's very much the case that we are adopted into the family of God. And as a result of being adopted into that family there are house rules. God says to us, “If you have My name then this is how a child with My name will act.” And so that's the way we ought to think about it.

And you know, I gave you the example of doctors and the Hippocratic oath. In other words, the doctor takes the Hippocratic oath and can't go and practice medicine willy-

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nilly. He has to go and practice medicine according to the oath that he’s taken. In other words, the oath provides the straight practice that he’ll engage in.

And we saw some of that in the last section. We saw humility and gentleness and patience and love, and those sorts of things that are to characterize the body of Christ. And the interesting thing is that we noticed that this kind of theology not only gives direction to life, but also binds us together. There is one God and one Spirit and one church, and so on.

So there’s a structure as we come to the lessons in stride. There’s a structure that we ought to take note of. And that structure is in verses 1-6. We find unity being stressed. And then interestingly enough in verses 7-12 we find diversity being stressed. And then in verses 13-16 we find a return to unity. And so there’s unity, there’s diversity, and there’s unity.

Now the question that we have to ask is this. What’s the diversity that’s being spoken of here? The unity is obvious. The unity is what we possess in Jesus Christ, what we possess as a result of being united to Him. We are one body. And certainly we know that there are many parts to that body. There are hands and feet, and so on. And each one of those segments of the body has its own place, its own special role in the body.

So for instance I use my hands to pick utensils up. I don’t use my feet to do that. I use my feet to walk; I don’t use my hands to walk, those kinds of things. And we know that within the body of Christ people function in that exact same way.

But they’re one body. And that one body means that they confess one Lord. They have one God and there is one purpose to which they serve. And so all of that is part of the unity.

Now what’s the diversity? Our world talks a lot about diversity today. And our world talks a lot about diversity with human beings in mind. And so, for instance, they’ll talk about gender diversity. Well actually, that’s not the case. What they want us to believe is that gender is neutral, and so it’s monadic. It’s not diverse in that sense. And so since it’s monadic, since gender is neutral, then one can identify with any gender they want. And there’s that sort of thing.

But there’s also this idea of diversity that’s out in our world that basically says that there are people that are different from us and that we need to accept them. Now obviously that’s true in one sense. Let me put it this way. The church ought to be diverse. If you look in the book of Revelation it’s made up of all peoples, nations, tongues, and so on. We ought to have people from every part of the world in the church of Jesus Christ, and in that sense it’s diverse.

But our world wants us to basically open ourselves up and say, “You know, you need to acknowledge that sinful practices that I engage in, well those are just as diverse and legitimate as anything that you practice.” That’s where our world is heading when it talks about diversity.

That’s not the way the Bible talks about diversity. It does speak about diverse people, different ethnicities and nations and so on. That’s a wonderful thing. Like I said, the church ought to be made up of many ethnic groups.

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But one of the things that we need to keep in mind is that this passage is not talking about that. There is one people of God no matter their ethnicity. And those people are served by a multitude or a diversity of gifts.

Now here's the interesting thing. When you turn to something like 1 Corinthians chapter 12 or Romans chapter 12, one of the things that you find is that you find a list of gifts. And those lists of gifts are diverse. You find giving and leadership and administration and all sorts of things, hospitality and the like. But in this list, this diverse list, there's a sense of unity here. And I want you to catch that sense of unity here.

But before I say anything about that list I want you to notice that what we have here pictured is a victorious King who comes, leaves captivity captive, and gives gifts to men. Perhaps a way of thinking about this is a story I was told by Sinclair Ferguson.

When he was a young child there was a new queen who came to the throne. And when she did she gave gifts to all the little children in every town in the United Kingdom. And he being a Scottish boy received one of those gifts.

And that's the idea. This new King comes to power. And in this case this new queen comes to power and disperses gifts indicative of the prosperity of her reign throughout the kingdom.

Well, that is probably the best way to think about what's happening here. The victorious Lord Jesus Christ, victorious in the way that He has already been described in what He has done for us, now gives gifts to men. And the question is what are those gifts? And the answer is apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers.

Now the question is this. What do those gifts have in common? I said that there is a diversity of things, and that's true. You can see that apostles aren't prophets and prophets aren't evangelists. But I also said to you that there is a sense of unity that this list possesses. So what do these have in common?

Well, one of the things that they have in common, or at least the main thing that these have in common, is that they are all revelation oriented. In other words, all of these gifts are oriented toward revelation. And that means that God has given gifts to men who will handle the revelation that He has given.

So think about it. You have apostles who were inspired to write, prophets who were inspired to speak, evangelists who carried that inspired Word and speak it to people, pastors and teachers who both proclaim and teach the word of God. So all of these gifts given to men are oriented toward handling the revelation of God given to men.

And so that is then followed up with a purpose. And that purpose is in verse 12: *“for equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”* And so here we find that the gifts that Christ gives to His church have a valuable purpose. They're not like the toys that the queen gave to all the children of the kingdom that are now immaterial. They are purposeful gifts; they're enduring gifts, lasting gifts.

And so the person who handles the revelation of God is in the midst of the people of God for the benefit of the people of God, and in this case for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

Something really interesting about that is this. The men who are gifted to handle revelation are equipped by that same revelation in order to equip God's people to serve.

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And I’m thinking of 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 where it says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”* And certainly Paul would have had in mind chief among these good works the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry.

So the idea then is that these diversities of gifts are given to the church. And having been given to the church they take the revelation of God which prepares them for their work, and they prepare the church for that same work.

There are obviously some questions that are attached to some of these gifts. For instance, some people may ask questions about apostles. And of course the apostles were a small group of twelve. And they were specifically gathered by the Lord. Obviously there was a replacement and Paul was an apostle unnaturally born. But the point is that that group was very limited. And when they died that office died with them.

And we find that there’s a natural replacement of the apostles. For instance in Acts chapter 15 you find that who gathered together at the Council of Jerusalem in order to decide on that weighty theological matter brought up in Acts chapter 15 but the apostles and elders of the church. And what we’re being told by Luke is that it was both apostles and elders or *presbuteros* who were able to come together and decide this theological matter, thus instilling the church with confidence that when the apostles were gone the *presbuteros*, the elders, would be present to carry on their work.

What about prophets? I think that prophets were an inspired ministry given for a time. But when the word of Christ came in inscripturated form there was no longer a need for the prophets. That doesn’t mean that God’s hands are tied. It means that the ordinary way in which God speaks is not through the prophetic office but through His word.

Some may question whether or not pastors and teachers are separate offices or the same. Some may have the question of the continuing office of the evangelist, and so on. But I’m going to leave off with those things for now, and maybe we can come back to them at another time. Until we do, may the Lord bless you.