

Sept. 13 – Leader’s Guide - The Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4 is the fulcrum of the book of Ephesians as Paul moves from right belief to right behavior. The first three chapters of Ephesians reveal the eternal purposes of God in Jesus, to put everything that is out of place in the world back into its proper place. Jesus comes to a people who are alienated from God in sin and brings forgiveness, adoption as God’s children, a new way of being human. Jesus comes to a world that experiences division between tongue and tribe and nation and opens up a path to reconciliation between all people. Jesus comes to a world marred by sin and injustice and gives us a new future where all things will come under his healing reign. In chapter 4 Paul begins to tell us that the way in which God is working out that eternal purpose in the world is through the church. He then invites the church to “walk worthy of the calling to which we have been called”.

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

1. (1) The word worthy was not about measuring up. It was a word used of scales. When you put a weight on one side of the scale you needed to put another weight of equal value on the other side to balance the scale out. If the above paragraph reflects the new reality that Jesus brings about, how would we walk in balance with that calling? In other words, how do we conduct ourselves as church that properly reflects this new reality?

This is a question that is getting after the proper way to live if what God has done in Jesus is the new reality, the new destiny of our world.

This would shape an optimism that the future of our world is one where all things are made right.

This would shape a rejection of progress in terms of it being within our power as human beings to bring this future about – no – it is about God’s work in and through us.

It would shape the work of the church to be focused not just on evangelism – inviting people into a new relationship with God – but also on social justice – bearing witness to the new future where justice and righteousness reign.

It would invite the church to reflect racial reconciliation in its makeup to not reflect the divisions we see around us but mirror a unity because of Christ.

2. (3-6) This passage is all about the gifts that God gives us so that we might walk in balance with the calling. The first gift that we are given is the unity of the Spirit. What is the basis for this unity?

One body – we together make us Christ’s body on earth – giving us a singular purpose directed by Jesus’ purpose on earth – to bring all things under his healing reign.

One Spirit – the Spirit of God that lives in you lives in me – the eternal life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit binds us together as one.

One hope – we have our eyes focused on a future where all things will come under Jesus’ reign.

One Lord – we together are marked by our obedience to the Lord of all.

One faith – we have been rescued by our trust in the work of Jesus in his death and resurrection.

One baptism – we have been immersed together in his saving death, washed from all our sins.

One God and Father of all – we all call upon God intimately as Father – making us siblings of the same family.

3. Have you ever experienced this kind of unity? What was it like?

This is a self-reflection question but it might be helpful to reflect on the example Tim used of feeling more sense of unity with someone who in every other way is different from us but who shares the Lord, compared with someone we are the same as in every way except that we don’t share the Lord.

4. Be eager to maintain the unity. One of the things Tim mentioned to maintain this unity is to approach everyone and every interaction through the lens of who we are in Christ and what God has done for us in Jesus. What might this look like practically?

Who we are in Christ:

That the other bears the image of God, is beloved, forgiven, a son or daughter of the living God.

What God has done for us in Jesus:

When we are called to forgive we see how he has forgiven us

When we are called to lay down something of our own for the sake of the other we see how he laid down his life for us.

When we are called to love someone we don't even like – we see his love – that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

5. What other things could be done to maintain this unity?

There would be no right or wrong answer here. This is simply a question to bring us to a place where we are considering the practical ways we can maintain the unity that has been given to us. Invite in your conversation practical commitments to maintaining unity and perhaps in your next gathering follow up so that your group can have an element of accountability in it – as Hebrews puts it – to spur one another on in love and good deeds.