

Session 3

August 9, 2020

WE SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Whether referred to as a bride (Rev. 19:7-8), a building (2 Pet. 2:4-5), or a body (1 Cor. 12:27), the church has a unique relationship to Christ, and shares a unique relationship among fellow members of it. Regarding Christ, the church is to be *submissive*. Regarding fellow members, the church is to be *cooperative*. Our text this week focuses on how church members function together as a community. Paul highlights three key areas.

We move together (vv. 1-6). In this case, Paul was a *prisoner for the Lord* in two ways. Physically, he was in a jail cell during his first Roman imprisonment (see 3:1). Spiritually, Paul was fully under the Lordship of Christ. What the world considered shameful, Paul considered a high honor. His opening exhortation is to live out the doctrinal teaching of the preceding chapters in a practical, tangible way; that is to *walk* in a way *worthy* of their position in Christ (v. 1). Verses 2 and 3 describe *how* this is to be done: with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. The verses that follow then tell *why* this is to be done: for the sake of unity (v. 4). While “uniformity” means that everyone looks alike, “unity” means everybody moves in the same direction. The same Spirit that gives us peace, gives us a sense of oneness in presence and in purpose. So what are those essential things that unify believers? In verses 4-6, the apostle lists seven common elements that all true Christ-followers share: one body (the true church); one Spirit (the Holy Spirit that all believers possess); one hope (eternal life in heaven); one Lord (the Lord Jesus Christ); one faith (the pure doctrine contained in His word); one baptism (all believers “immersed” into the body of Christ); one God and Father (who is sovereign over all things).

We minister together (vv. 7, 11-13). In these verses, Paul moves from the unity *of* the church, to the diversity *within* the church. By grace believers are called into the body as one. By grace as well, believers are gifted differently to preserve that oneness. And that giftedness (like the salvation mentioned in chapter 1) is appropriated by Christ alone, according to His good pleasure alone. Whereas the apostle Paul addressed the multiplicity (and subsequent abuse) of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, here he points out their functions in broad categories. Sometimes called “offices,” these categories demonstrate the *roles* given to various believers in the church. But rest assured, Christ does not appoint offices in the church apart from gifting people to fill them! *Apostles* are those who are sent out. While the original twelve come to mind, the term could still apply generally to missionaries. *Prophets* are those who speak on behalf of God. *Evangelists* are those especially gifted to share the gospel witness among the lost. The phrase *pastors and teachers* might be separated into two or taken as one. Arguably, the nuance of pastoral ministry is one of *shepherding* the flock, while that of teacher is *training* the flock in God’s word. Both roles are assumed by—and expected of—today’s local pastor. The purpose of these offices is equally important. Those who are specially gifted are not to assume all the work! Rather, the purpose of those gifted is to *equip the saints* for the work of ministry, ultimately building up the body of Christ.

We mature together (vv. 13-16). In every case, God’s desire is that the body of Christ mature. This is done by the exercising of spiritual giftedness among the body of believers. When is that

maturity reached? When we all are unified in the faith (beliefs) and knowledge (understanding) of the Son of God and can genuinely reflect all that is represented in the fullness of Christ (v. 13). And what is the result of that maturity? A body that is steadfast in the faith (v. 14), loving among the brethren (v. 14), submissive to the headship of Christ (v. 15), and functioning as a living, moving, healthy, coordinated, and growing body (v. 16).