

“What Does A Healthy Church Look Like?” (Ephesians 4:1-16)

Introduction

- 1) I love football. Pop Warner, High School, College or Professional: I love it all. It is fascinating and exciting to watch the offensive, defensive and special teams come together as a coordinated and united fighting machine, with one goal in mind: win the game. It also amazes me to see how each member of the team brings their own particular skills and talents to their position, and how comical and tragic it would be if they brought those same skills and talents to the wrong position. Imagine Troy Aikman as a nose guard, Nate Newton as a safety, or Emmitt Smith as a defensive end! It is not a pretty picture. However, when each one is in just the right position, doing the right job with the goal of team victory before their eyes, you just might win three Super Bowls in the last decade of the 20th century.

- 2) What is true of football is equally true, if not more true of the Church, the body of Christ. When each member of the Church is in the right position, doing the right job and for the right reason, you just might win your community and influence the world for the glory of God and the honor of His Son Jesus. Indeed you will be what the Bible describes as a “healthy church.”

Transition

What does a healthy church look like? When God puts His team together what shape will it take? What will your assignment be? What position will you play? Paul puts before us four characteristics of a healthy church made up of healthy Christians.

- I. *It is characterized by unity. 4:1-6*
 God desires our unity, our oneness. Unity is not uniformity. Uniformity is when we look alike and act alike. That is boring and not much use. Unity is when we walk together and work together with common convictions and commitments. Two are essential.

1) There must be a oneness of humility (behavior). 4:1-3

1. “Therefore” connects chapters 4-6 (duty) with chapters 1-3 (doctrinal). The order matters. Doctrine before duty.
2. Paul is a prisoner (not of Rome but of the Lord). He beseeches (*parakalo*) – exhorts, encourages personally and urgently.
3. Walk – key idea (cf. 4:17; 5:2; 8, 15) pre. tense; continually walk.
4. Worthy – lit. means “to be of equal weight,” with balance. “Live lives (chapters 4-6) equal to the great blessings described in chapters 1-3.” (Hughes, 121).
5. Calling – “the sovereign, saving calling of God” (MacArthur) A call to salvation and to service.
6. Verse two notes four aspects of our unified behavior.
 - a. Lowliness – humility, true self-evaluation, true self-awareness. Uses the standard of Christ, not others, to measure oneself.
 - b. Gentleness – meekness, a God controlled man, conviction under control, a spirit of submission. Note Moses (Num. 12:3) and Jesus (Matt. 11:29). Strength under control. Meekness is not weakness.
 - c. Longsuffering – patience with people, no retaliation or revenge; suffers and waits ... truest evidence of death to self / ego.
 - d. Forbearing – “there is room in your love for those who hurt or offend you.” Spirit enabled restraint.
7. Endeavoring – (pre. tense) – working, giving diligence, to be eager, to make every effort, to be zealous.
Keep – to guard, maintain.
 *Unity is kept not created! How? By the Spirit who is the bond, the one who binds or keeps us together in peace.

2) There must be a oneness of theology (belief). 4:4-6

1. Theology matters. What we believe matters. What we believe is wed to how we live. The two go together.
2. Seven facets of our unity are noted in verses 4-6.
3. Verse four is the Spirit’s verse.
 Verse five is the Sin’s verse.
 Verse six is the Father’s verse.
 As our Triune God is one, we must be one.

4. One body – no barriers, one living organism
One Spirit – the energizer of the body (1 Cor. 12:13)
One hope – to be like Him and with Him, made possible by the work of the Spirit.
5. One Lord – His name is Jesus (there are not two Lords)
Acts. 2:36 – “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.” *NAS*
Romans 10:12 – “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him.” *NAS*
Romans 14:7-9 – “For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived *again*, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” *NAS*
One faith – here the experience of faith is in view, our personal trust in the one Lord.
One baptism – here water is in view.
Curtis Vaughn (p. 90) summarizes it well: “The point of the verse is that there is one Lord who is to be obeyed and adored; one believing experience that brings people into saving union with that Lord; and one outward, visible ceremony by which believers confess their faith and are openly incorporated into the fellowship of God’s people.”
6. One God and Father – no polytheism in Christianity, no New Age mysticism like that of Shirley MacLaine who says, “Each soul is its own God. You must never worship anyone or anything other than self. For you are God. To love self is to love God.” (*Dancing in the Light*, 358). No, there is only one God who has revealed Himself as Father to all who believe in Jesus. He is above all (sovereignty) through all (immanency), and in you all (intimacy).

Application

Beliefs are important, they are crucial to our witness and to our unity. Even the *Marine Corps Book of Strategy* states, “Doctrine provides the basis for harmonious actions and mutual understanding” (*Warfighting*, 57). General George Patton: “Untutored courage is useless in the face of educated bullets.” (*Calvary Journal*, April 1922, p. 167) It is imperative that we

know what we believe, and why we believe, and how we will live! Taking a stand on belief and behavior will not be popular. It goes against the tide of the modern world.

Illustration

Report in RNS (August 16, 2000)

(RNS) Remarks by a Presbyterian minister at a recent peace conference that Christian proselytizing is sometimes akin to religious “ethnic cleansing” have conference organizers scurrying to finesse his remarks in order to dampen growing criticism of the conference.

The Rev. Dirk Ficca, a Chicago minister and executive director of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, spoke at the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference in Orange, Calif., July 26-29.

In his remarks, Ficca told the 600 participants that Christianity is only one of the world’s religions and does not necessarily hold the corner on truth.

“Imagine that you’re in a church and that light is streaming through a number of stained-glass windows. The light is truth; the windows are religion; and the church is the world. Note that the window is not the light ... Religions need to be distinguished from the light of God that shines through them.”

Ficca drew a distinction between “evangelizing” the good news of the gospel and “proselytizing” to make converts. Too often, Ficca said, non-Christians view proselytizing efforts as a form of religious “ethnic cleansing.”

“God’s ability to work in our lives is not determined by becoming a Christian,” Ficca said. “... So what’s the big deal about Jesus?”

What is the big deal about Jesus? That’s easy. It is the reality of a place called heaven and a place called hell and the fact that He is the one and only one who can get you to heaven and save you from hell. This is what we say and this is where we stand. On this we are united.

Transition

A healthy church is characterized by unity. Second.....

II. It is characterized by diversity. 4:7-11

When Jesus went back to heaven He did not leave us empty handed. As the ascended Lord He poured out His gifts as the

victorious general on His subjects, His saints. Jesus saved us not just from sin, He also saved each one of us for service.

1. *Appreciate a giving Savior. 4:7-10*

- a) Each one of us (no one is left out) has received enabling grace in the precise and exact proportion Christ gave it.
- b) Citing Psalm 68:18 Paul sees the incarnation and ascension of Christ as evidence that God has come and rescued His people as victorious King. Having received the gifts, the spoils of His victory over sin, death, hell and the grave (the thrust of Ps. 68:18), our Lord now gives back to His people spiritually gifted men and women that they might minister to people, His church (the application of Eph. 4:8).
- c) Christ is the ascended Lord. He has led captive the powers of evil, that attacked, conquered and enslaved us. The one who came all the way down has now gone all the way up. In so doing He is far above all, fills all, and gives gifts to all. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

2. *Acknowledge gifted saints. 4:11*

- a) Spiritual gifts are mentioned in four texts of Scripture: Romans 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4 and 1 Peter 4.
- b) Verse 7 affirms that everyone has at least one. Spiritual gifts are not natural talents. Natural talents are abilities you have by natural birth. Spiritual gifts are what you receive by Spiritual birth. Often the two have nothing in common!
- c) Verse 11 gives attention to four that are essential for the health of the church. “He Himself” is emphatic. He and no one else gave us these gifted saints.
- d) Apostles and prophets are foundational. Apostle in a technical sense refers to the twelve; in a general sense to any “sent one.” It would fit our missionaries. Prophets were forth-tellers even more than future-tellers. Prophets were bold proclaimers of God’s revelation.
- e) Evangelists are spiritual obstetricians gifted in bringing forth new births. Some, like Billy Graham, Luis Palau and Jay Strack do it before large crowds. Others are gifted in sharing their faith one on one.

- f) Pastors and teachers is best translated pastor-teacher. They are spiritual pediatricians who lead and feed, provide for and protect. They minister to us and with us but not for us.

Transition

Why would I say this? Because a healthy church:

III. It is characterized by ministry. 4:12-14

“Every member a minister” is a worthy motto for any church. It is also the biblical model. Note five things God wills for every one of His children.

1) Be equipped. 4:12

The church is not a bus where the pastor does all the driving and does his best to coax and cajole as many as he can to get aboard. The church is a body and every one has a function to perform, a part to play.

Equipping – to put in place, to reset dislocated bones, to be made complete. Why? For the work of the ministry. You have, I have, we all have a work of ministry grounded in the spiritual gifts given to us by God. Your pastor has been gifted by God to do some things you can’t do. But, you have been gifted by God to do some things he can’t do! The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody was once confronted by a person and criticized for the way he preached (his grammar) and conducted evangelistic rallies (too emotional and unsophisticated). Moody responded by saying, “I’m doing the best I can with what I’ve got. What are you doing with what God gave you?” On another occasion he was again criticized for his evangelistic methods. He simply responded by saying, “I like the way I do it better than the way you don’t.” We are all to be equipped for our work of ministry.

2) Be edified. 4:12

Edify means to build up, to mature, to develop. When all of us are doing our part, the Church, the body of Christ, grows. It grows up (worship). It grows out (evangelism). It grows within (discipleship). It is edified, made strong, vibrant, alive! Ernest Hemingway said, “Never confuse movement with action.” (in *Papa Hemingway*) Just because we are moving

doesn't mean we are going anywhere. We want to go and grow to be the Church God saved us to be.

3) *Be educated. 4:13*

God has a destiny, a goal at which His church is to aim. It consists of three parts: 1) Unity in the faith, 2) Knowledge (*epignoseos*), full and experiential knowledge of the Son, and, 3) a perfect (*teleion*), a complete, mature person. God wants us to know Him and know Him truthfully! Unfortunately, most don't!

World 8-19-2000; p. 15

--A survey by pollster George Barna on American religious beliefs revealed that seventy-five percent of Americans – including more than 40 percent of born-again Christians – agreed with the unbiblical statement, “**The Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves.**” Mr. Barna said this exposes Americans’ belief “that God is merely our assistant, not our foundation.” More than 40 percent of born-again Christians also said that the Holy Spirit and Satan do not exist.

What in the World (1998), p. 2

A survey of born-again Christians revealed that **45 percent believed Jesus committed sins!**

We must be educated, we must love God with all our hearts and with all our minds. C. S. Lewis said it well, “God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than any other slackers.”

4) *Be enlarged. 4:13*

“till we come ... to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” God did not save us simply to take us to heaven. He saved us to make us like Jesus (Rom. 8:29). That goal will never change. Some day that goal will be perfectly completed. Be enlarged after the model of our Savior.

5) *Be established 4:14*

1. Children – (spiritually) an immature baby or child (set in contrast to the man of verse 13). The immature are never settled; they are fickle, shifting, not dependable. They have

no roots, no convictions, no commitments. When tough times come they run. When a slick presentation is made they are deceived. They are blown about, tricked with loaded dice, fooled by clever schemes and deceived by the plots of the evil one.

2. They are more likely to trust their own reason, experience, feelings and advice of men than they are the counsel of God.

Transition

Be established. Know the Word and obey the Word. What will be the result for the church?

IV. *It is characterized by maturity. 4:15-16*

Albert Yu was speaking of high-performance companies. He could just as easily been speaking about the church. In the *New York Times* bestseller, *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, Yu said, “the trick is to pull together as a total ... entity. Compare it to an orchestra made up of different instruments but all performing one symphony together. Every player has a major role. If we are out of sync, we are in trouble.” (p. 113) When we are pulling together, playing our role, “in sync:” What will we be? What must we do?

1) *Be mature in your speech 4:15*

We continually speak with / in *agape* and we “grow up” in Christ who is our head, our Lord. Speak the truth but do it in love. If you can’t say it in love then just shut up!

2) *Be mature in your service 4:16*

a) Together: every part doing its share.

b) God makes some of us 1000-gallon vessels and others His half-pint vessels! However, He is far more pleased with a half-pint running over than a 1000-gallon vessel only half full!

3) *Be mature in your sensitivity 4:16*

a) We began with love (v. 2), we end with love.

b) When we all do our part: 1) the body grows and, 2) the body is built up in love.

What does that look like, say, on an individual basis? When each is doing his/her part? It looks like:

- 1) Language therapist **Lucy Smith** and her faith-based literacy program for Texas prisoners. She spends eight hours a day in Dallas and Fort Worth jails. A 61-year-old grandmother of seven, she oversees 44 tutors who teach roughly 60 inmates per week. “If a person can’t read the Word of God for himself, he cannot ascertain truths for his life,” she told *WORLD*. Her efforts have caught the attention of state prison officials who are now encouraging the development of faith-based programs across the state.
- 2) 93-year-old **Karl Mix**, who after a life of ministry to shut-ins in hospitals, sanitariums and prisons, now volunteers his services at a geriatric psychiatry center in Canton, Ohio where he visits patients once a week and leads Sunday morning services.
- 3) **Lt. Jeff Francis**, who, as the founder of the Chattanooga, Tenn., police department’s first gang division, spends his days working with troubled youth. Then he goes home and works with troubled adults. For the past 16 years, he and his wife, Gail, have cared for mentally handicapped adults as house parents for the Orange Grove Center. They also homeschool their four children and interpret for the deaf at their local church. *World*, 8-14-2000, p. 14.

What does it look like? It looks like this letter written by Columbine martyr, Cassie Bernall, to a teenage friend:

I am just so thankful for everything He’s done for me, as well as for others. Even when things are bad, He’s stood next to me and things are a little less prone to becoming blown out of proportion by my emotions ... You know, I wonder what God is going to do with my life? Like my purpose. Some people become missionaries and things, but what about me? What does God have in store for me? Where do my talents and gifts lie? For now, I’ll just take it day by day. I’m confident that I’ll know someday. Maybe I’ll look back at my life and think “Oh, so that was it!” Isn’t it amazing, this plan we’re a part of? ...

-- Cassie Bernall

letter to a friend, June 28, 1998

printed in *She Said Yes: The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*

Conclusion

God's will is that we be a healthy church. To be a healthy church, we must be healthy Christians. To be a healthy Christian, you must know Christ, truly, genuinely, really. Then and only then, can you play the part He has, just for you, in this grand plan of His.