

10/07/2022 - Pastor Lloyd's Sermon Notes

EPHESIANS 4 GROW IN UNITY AND CELEBRATE YOUR DIVERSITY!

The first three chapters of Ephesians teach us about what God has **done for us**. How he has bridged this great chasm between him and us and then us and each other. Last week I spoke about *Grace and Mercy and Kingdom Culture*. The second half of the book is the flip side of this and answers the question – **how then should we live** this out? What does this look like in practice? We have spent quite a bit of money over the last couple of years since I have been here on our church building. Auditorium revamps, new seats, improved sound system, staging, curtains and so on.... then in the café new seating, new kitchen upgrade to industrial standard and the latest is a new heating system in café to keep us warm. But a more important question is **what kind of a church are we going to put inside these buildings?** The church is not the buildings it is the people and it is the people who will make these buildings hum along or get stuck in repetitious religion (like the Lutheran sect I spoke about last week from Babettes Feast) with no life. It is the people alongside you this morning who are **the key to the future** of this church. It is not the new pastor coming, look along the rows – you are the ones who will decide what Ranui Baptist church will become in the next ten years! Ephesians 4 tells us how to ensure this will have a great outcome. Do you think it is a sure bet that we will listen and do what God says? Is there a church at Ephesus today? No, it's a bunch of ruins. I guess they didn't listen even with the best teacher, best leaders, and the greatest opportunity – they still lost their way.

CELEBRATE YOUR DIVERSITY

Every time I see some news article on North Korea, I see pretty much the same thing. People with the same uniforms marching to the same beat, looking the same, doing the same, and all in time to perfection. And I see a leader who wants to impress the world with his fearless control by having everything perfectly scripted, no one steps out of line, and no one is different. Anyone who does not toe the party line is subdued, side-lined, and silenced. The press is muzzled and freedoms are non-existent. That is not the picture of the church!

He does completely the opposite, he gives **diverse** gifts to his church and asks us to celebrate our diversity. God takes great **risks** with us – you and me! He goes to extreme lengths to emphasise this. Starting with **creation**, just look around, it's like he has purposely created colour and imagination into every aspect of life. Then he made us....no two of us are the same, no two fingerprints, we are different in *looks and personality*. We read in this chapter as if those differences are not enough, we have different giftings – he has gifted us all **differently and liberally** – why? - **so, we need each other**. It's called interdependence (not independence). In this chapter, we read that God has gifted his church with key ministries and gifts. This is **not an exhaustive** list and then he tells us why he has done this. So that by using these diverse gifts we can **build up each other, serve the mission** of God in the world, and **train and equip** each other to be passionate about what God asks us to each do. Now, what's more, in this chapter he tells us that when Jesus gave out these gifts he then **ascended to heaven** and left the job to us to manage (stewards)! He has **no other plan** than the one he has put in place. He does not look down from heaven and go.... gosh, I think I got that wrong, maybe I should go down there again and sort it out or give them another hand or try another strategy.

The other morning, I woke up and when I looked at my **mobile phone** it said I had an upgrade waiting. Do I want to upgrade now? Yes, I said. Then it downloaded a whole lot of new software upgrades and rebooted the phone and a new improved plan was put in place that told me I had now a superior package in several areas. God does not do that with us nor his plan! This is a **one-time strategic plan** that is not getting an upgrade. God gifts his church and then leaves this planet, and sends the Spirit to infill us and equip us for ministry! So how are we traveling with this? Well, in short, the answer is not too good. We have messed it up quite well. Across the body of Christ, we are divided and spend most of our time arguing over which and what **gifts** are for today, who has what and when, and who should do what and when. Whole clusters of churches and denominations are divided over the way to celebrate communion, who should lead and who should make what decisions, and who should be allowed to do certain spiritual stuff while others are excluded.

Women in Ministry - I want to just take a moment to speak about something that may or may not be an issue for you and us as a church and that is the role of women in ministry. Now I have a very clear conviction about this that I can support from various scriptures in the New Testament. The overriding text is *'in Christ, there is no male nor female.'* There are many verses that speak of spiritual gifts that imply gender in no way denies nor prefers male or female. The argument that leadership is male is supported mostly from the Old Testament. In the NT there are women prophetesses and women deacons. The only scripture which is often quoted by people wanting to refuse ministry roles to women is the one by Paul to Timothy about women keeping silent in the church and not having authority over men. This text I think relates to a *customary and cultural issue* of the day and should not be used to support restrictions on female ministry. Now if you're with me so far, - I shall now lose some of you probably because I'm going to step a little bit over the edge here. For me, the only area where I have some discomfort with women in ministry would be in a senior pastor's role. It's not because it's against the teachings of the NT, it's more because of the perception and refusal of people to endorse and support such an appointment. In other words, **it's our issue, not Gods** nor the Bibles! But what I want to say is this. We should not focus on the one thing that is potentially a problem and allow it to deny us everything else God has for us. For years we have been inconsistent where we have sent out women to preach teach and lead on the mission fields of the world but when they come home all of a sudden, they are restricted from doing so – how can that be right? The overwhelming teaching of the NT is that women can too! They can exercise any ministry gifting, and take up any role. I've seen the way our women operate on our elder's leadership team and they are impressive, and remember this it's a team of leaders who are *mutually submissive* to each other. The issue that leadership causes the wheels to come off is never about gender it is about *hierarchal control and independence*. And friends, men can do that very well too! Time will not allow me to go verse by verse through this issue, but I felt I wanted to lay out where I believe this sits to help you navigate through and help us all to celebrate our diversity and include everyone as being gifted and able to contribute to an effective mission. Remember this, if we do not release women into their gifting and ministry, we are effectively denying 50% of our people from participating in their God-given roles and gifting.

Celebrate your diversity, God made you different for a reason that you each can contribute to the body and make it function properly. Now how do we manage this kind of diversity and not let it disintegrate us? The second half of the chapter tells us this.

GROW UP!

The second half of the chapter **v13-16** tells us to grow up and mature so we can be complete in our development. I don't know how many times when I was young with three siblings all older than me, I was told... come on Lloyd why don't you just **grow up and act your age!** Maybe I was just a late developer. But here is exactly what the teaching is for these believers. They needed to grow up. Babies are cute but they need to grow up and stop messing all over the place. Get out of nappies and get some control! They need to learn to share. You know there is a very detailed list of developmental activities that can measure how well a baby and toddler is doing. Sometimes with people don't you just want to say to them – grow up! We become fixated with our things, our toys, our rights.... just listen to radio talkback for an ample supply of egotistical narcissism! Yet in this chapter which raises this incredible and amazing diversity that is truly God-given, there is a simple recipe for keeping us from blowing apart.

There is a unity that comes with this diversity. V4-6

One Spirit, One Lord, and One Father.... there it is right there. That unity is not based on **what we do** and what gifts but on **who we worship**. It is as we look up to the Father, the Spirit, and the Son that our unity is established and maintained. So, at the base, there can exist this incredible diversity but our focus is upwards not out at each other. And it is here we have made our greatest mistakes. We think unity is based on all *thinking the same, looking the same, and acting the same* – No! It is based on our relationship with God the Father by the Spirit through Jesus Christ.

Each of these in the trinity has a function

The Father - who is *above all and through all and in all*.... you cannot escape!

The Son – *one faith and one baptism*. That is your profession of faith in Christ!

The Spirit – *one body and one hope*. It is the Spirit in us that makes the body function and hang together and not disintegrate.

V 17 -31 Here again the emphasis is on correct teaching and doctrine. That we know what we believe, time and time again this point is made. Why is this? Because right thinking produces the right choices and decisions. Lastly, we are reminded that it is both the brain and the body that need to work together to get the right result. **Your thinking will affect what you tell your arms and legs to do.** The last verses of the chapter are basically a list of specific examples of *stop-and-start* living choices. If you're a thief stop doing that, start working and earning your own money. Stop lies, start telling truth. Stop ending the day angry, start confessing your emotions. Stop foul language and start speaking words of encouragement that build up. Stop bitterness, lies, and anger, and start being kind and forgiving

I want to finish today by saying this: Do you know what gifts and skills God has given you and are you using them? We will never become the church you dream of without you giving yourself to God's work in your gifting. If you think our church is lacking in some area of ministry the first thing you need to ask yourself is not what the elders or leadership team is doing to fix it.... but what are you doing – is God talking to you!

Children's Ministry

Youth Ministry

Prayer Ministry

Small-Group Leadership / Alpha

Worship Bands

Kitchen and Helps

Property and Maintenance

Prophetic and Intercessors

I've made two points today....

Celebrate Diversity and get using the gifts God has given you.

Grow up into maturity and don't get side-lined by some theology that gives you an excuse to do nothing! You know when someone comes to me as pastor and says they want the church to support them in some ministry endeavour – the first thing I do is think has this person been demonstrating gifting and faithfulness and maturity now in some way? If not – it's all just hot air that will never go anywhere.

Ministry goes in two directions.... firstly, **up to God** (The Trinity) in worship then **out into the World** with people. It never starts with people. It starts with your love for God when you get that focus right – you are drawn closer in unity to people. We are ***first of all worshippers before we are doers!***