

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 16)

Ephesians 4:7-10

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One of the most difficult challenges for us during this quarantine situation is maintaining as best we can the semblance of oneness in the body of Christ when we are unable to even meet in person. Even back before this all happened, Sunday service alone was not really enough to foster the deep unity we strive for. Although we were able to worship together, sermons themselves are by nature not very interactive, and the refreshment time we had afterwards is a bit too public for many of us to really share deeply with one another. This is why it has always been important, and perhaps is even more important now, to have Sunday +1, that is to meet with brothers and sisters in Christ at least once a week outside of Sunday in a fellowship, prayer group, or Bible study. Especially now when services are streaming, it's too easy to be anonymous, to just receive from the church without participating in it or being a part of us. For those who have never come to our church but are now able to join us through the stream, you need to know that this is not what church is supposed to be. This is just the best we can do in this situation. Once we come back to meeting together in person, I wish you would consider visiting us and being a part of us. That's what church is. In church we meet with, serve, support, and encourage one another in love. There is no greater expression of the new life we have in the power of the resurrection of Jesus than truly being one in His body. John 17:20-21 tells us that unity in Jesus is the greatest testimony that He is the Christ, who was sent from the Father in heaven. So let us be united. Let us seek to meet each other outside of Sundays and serve each other. Let us participate and contribute to the church body, for each member has its function. Just like a potluck, everyone has something to bring to the table. And just like in an orchestra, everyone plays a part.

Looking back at the beginning of Ephesians 4, recall that Jesus' work on the cross created peace vertically between God and us, and horizontally between all of us, whether Jew or Gentile. We are all united in Jesus, the one and only Savior. And in v. 7 Paul tells us that our Savior gives us grace gifts. Verse 8 quotes Psalm 68 to compare Jesus to a conqueror returning back from a military campaign and generously distributing the spoils of war as he ascends to a high place. As Jesus ascended to heaven after conquering sin and death, He gave us all different gifts. These gifts are better viewed as abilities that come with privilege and responsibility, which

are meant for us to use to serve one another. 1 Corinthians describes this in much more detail.

We are all members of one body, and each member has its own function. If one member doesn't perform their function, the whole body suffers. Every member needs every other member. What is your function? What gift has Jesus given you? Are you using it to serve the church body?

Next, in vv. 9-10, Paul inserts an aside, explaining what it means for Jesus to ascend and the implication that He also first descended. He uses the phrase "lower regions, the earth" to describe where Jesus descended. Some interpret this as meaning Jesus went to hell between His death and resurrection, as if that was necessary in order for Him to truly be our substitute, since hell is the consequence of our sin. However, Jesus said on the cross that it was finished, which means the moment the Father forsook Jesus on the cross, on which He bore all our sins, was enough to save us from an eternity of separation from God. If this is true, then Paul is not referring to hell, but rather to the earth. Jesus descended from heaven to earth and ascended back to heaven again. John 3:13 also uses similar language to describe this descending and ascending. And when Jesus ascended, He was higher than all and filled all things. This is a way of saying that Jesus is now glorified, being above all. Jesus came down to do the work of salvation, ascended back to heaven distributing gifts to us, and is now glorified. So we see that the gifts we receive are not only to serve one another, but ultimately to bring Him glory. We serve and glorify Him by serving each other. Our gifts and the unity they help us live out is a testimony to His greatness. When He is magnified, we are also blessed. So let us serve and bless one another in order to exalt the name of our Savior.