

Open the Eyes of My Heart (Part 17)

Ephesians 4:11-16

Pastor Edward Cheng

May 17, 2020

Previously, we talked about how important unity is in the church, and how even with technology, the way things currently are in quarantine still only reproduces in part the unity we expect in church, the unity described by Paul in the beginning of Ephesians 4. However, in today's passage we see that as important as unity is, the ingesting and learning of the word of God takes logical priority, for it is through His word that we know Jesus, in whom we are united.

Recall in 4:7-8 Paul described how Jesus ascended after His victory over sin and death, and handed out the spoils of this victory to all of us. These spoils are spiritual gifts that we have the privilege of using to serve each other. All of us have different gifts that entail different roles and responsibilities in the church. Now in v. 11 Paul highlights five specific roles. He lists apostles (the 12 disciples and Paul, directly commissioned by Jesus), prophets (who speak on behalf of God, including preachers and teachers), evangelists (who proclaim the gospel), pastors (who feed God's people the word of God and guard them against false teaching), and teachers (who teach spiritual truth). The importance of mentioning these roles lies not in their differences, but rather their similarity. All of them have to do with telling people about the word of God.

When addressing spiritual gifts and roles within the church, Scripture tends to make the distinction between two broad groups. The first consists of roles related to the Word of God, for example preaching, teaching, leading Bible study, or teaching Sunday school. The second consists of roles related to deeds, which include acts of service, giving to the church or to those in need, hospitality, and administration. In our church the Pastoral Council focuses on "word ministry and prayer," and the Deacons focus on administration and deeds ministry. This structure comes from Acts 6, when deacons were appointed to handle the deeds ministry so that the apostles could focus on word ministry. We know from 1 Corinthians 12 that one is not more important than the other. Every member of the body is equally important. However, word ministry has logical priority because we are a spiritual body rooted in the truth of the gospel, which unites all the members.

Ephesians 4:12 tells us first that the word of God equips the saints for ministry. Knowing God through His word comes first, and all deeds must flow from a deep and accurate understanding of who God is, otherwise there is no distinction between us and the Mormons,

who do not know the Triune God and are not truly in the body of Christ. To serve in the body of Christ, we must first be in the body of Christ through true faith in Jesus. Second, v. 12 also tells us that teaching Scripture builds up the body of Christ. The church is built on the foundation of the gospel proclaimed by the apostles, with Jesus as the cornerstone. Without a strong foundation in the gospel, the church will fall. Third, in v. 13, God's word helps us become spiritually mature and strong. An accurate understanding of who Jesus is unites and strengthens us so that we can grow up together in faith. Finally in v. 14 Paul says that the word ministry protects us from false teaching. These false teachers are described as cunning, crafty, deceitful, and scheming. They are deceivers that mislead people by teaching lies. It is not uncommon for Christians to be led astray when they find themselves unknowingly attending churches led by false teachers. These teachers can be cult leaders like David Koresh, who exalted himself in line with Jesus and led his followers into a compound, ultimately resulting in a bloody shootout against the ATF and FBI. But false teachers can also be prominent mainstream pastors who preach a false gospel. We must be firmly rooted in the truth so we can recognize and guard against falsehood.

Verses 15-16 tell us what happens if the church operates as it should, being rooted in God's word. It enables the body to grow and mature, building itself up in love. The church will be strengthened and have a greater impact on the community. The love that abounds within the body of Christ will be a testimony to the truth of the gospel that is our foundation. And within the body, each member, being fed by the truth, will play their role in building up the body in health and strength. What spiritual gifts has God given you? What is your role? When you fulfill it, all the other members will be blessed. And whether it be through word ministry or deeds ministry, let us all be rooted in the Word of God so that we are equipped to perform our function in the body of Christ.