

## Achieving Unity of the Faith (Eph. 4:7-16)

Intro: Christians are one because God has made them one; but when we are united on the basis of our acceptance of the gospel our unity is not complete. In fact, it is just beginning. Every Christian comes to the Lord with a lack of knowledge of many things and with religious and personal baggage that he must learn to lay aside. His unity with other believers does not consist of a perfect or identical doctrinal understanding or practice. Instead, Paul shows us that preserving the “unity of the Spirit” enables us to achieve “the unity of the faith”. The unity of the Spirit is the product of conversion; the unity of the faith is the product of the teaching that takes place after conversion. (If they are viewed as the same we would be led to the idea that either all Christians are converted in full maturity or that no unity of the Spirit exists among Christians until everyone is fully taught. Neither will satisfy the language of Scripture.) Eph. 4:7-16

### **God uses all of us in the accomplishment of unity.**

*The work of unification is the work of the Holy Spirit; but God works in us to achieve it. That’s why we see that word “but” in v. 7.*

*It all begins with the grace God gives to each of us, v. 7. It is measured out in accord to the magnitude of our deliverance (“according to the measure of Christ’ gift”).*

*By the working of this grace:*

We may grow or mature spiritually ourselves.

We may help others to grow, v. 15-16. We’ll come back to this idea and close the loop. But first, we should think about how this all takes place in the body of Christ. It begins with Jesus Christ.

### **Christ has given “gifts” to make His teaching available to all, v. 8-11**

*The picture of v. 8 is derived from the 68<sup>th</sup> psalm. There God is portrayed as a warrior who conquers His enemies and leads them in triumph, distributing the spoils of battle to His people. So did Christ. When He ascended on high, he “led captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men”. I.e. he celebrates and manifests His victory over Satan by giving those he captured to His people as a means of blessing them. These gifts are people (three divisions indicated by the word “some”:*

Apostles and prophets—Endowed with the power of revelation

Evangelists—Herald the good news of salvation

Pastors & teachers—Lead and instruct the church; perhaps they are put together because they are so similar. Pastors must be “apt to teach” (Tit. 1). Some may be “teachers” but not pastors. But they are both species of the same genus.

*By means of these “gifts” the faith is made known. “For” describes the process; “until” describes the objective.*

**These teachers are given to enhance edification (v. 12)**

*They are not coordinate but relative. Years ago brethren were fond of using this passage as a proof text for “the work of the church” (edification, benevolence, evangelism). They were well intentioned, but misguided.*

Equipping the saints—This is the first step of the process. Every saint must know the word of God and have the spiritual strength and direction to use what he knows.

For the work of service—This is the second step those equipped may now serve according to the ability God has given them. All Christians are ministers whether in word or deed.

To the building up of the body—This is the third step; the body is built up.

*What Paul describes here is the process of spiritual growth.*

**The goal of this edification is spiritual maturity, v. 13. Paul describes this goal several ways:**

*The three seem to be to be essentially equivalent, describing one goal or objective in three ways:*

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith (Here it stands for the full knowledge for which one strives as a Christian. This emphasizes the **commonality** of the teaching).

Until we all attain to a mature man (This emphasizes **the end** of a process of growth).

Until we all attain to the measure of the stature that belongs to the fulness of Christ (This describes the **standard** of growth. We grow up into Him.)

*When we led the process work, then this is the goal toward which it all works.*

**The hallmarks of this spiritual maturity are: (v. 14-16)**

*Stability--We are no longer children (infants, in Greek) tossed. (v. 14)*

*Ability to teach others—“speaking the truth in love...” “Truth without love is brutality; love with truth is hypocrisy”. Both must go together in our teaching.*

*Christ-likeness--We are grown up (v. 15)*

*Cooperation--Consequently, the whole body is built up by that which every joint supplies, v. 16 and that completes the circle Paul began in v. 5.*

**Conclusion:** This unity is not like a trophy attained and put on a shelf; but a goal for which we strive. As the process continues to work, each of us strives toward greater knowledge and Christ-likeness. Each new convert renews the challenge to teach.

**This is God’s purpose for the church. This is the walking the walk, when we each seek to participate in the process of spiritual growth through worship and teaching. This is the deal we make with God when we become Christians—that we will commit ourselves to learn the will of God and to teach others what we**

**have learned. As we do this, we all grow up and grow closer; and the unity that God seeks is created.**