

Characteristics of a healthy church

"To remain divided is sinful! Did not our Lord pray, that they may be one, even as we are one"? (John 17:22). A chorus of ecumenical voices keep harping the unity tune. What they are saying is, "Christians of all doctrinal shades and beliefs must come together in one visible organization, regardless... Unite, unite!" Such teaching is false, reckless and dangerous. Truth alone must determine our alignments. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous. Our Lord's prayer in John 17 must be read in its full context. Look at verse 17: "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." Only those sanctified through the Word can be one in Christ. To teach otherwise is to betray the Gospel.

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Ephesians 4: 1 – 16

1) Unity motivated by love

- We are called to live a life worthy of the calling that we received
- What is our calling?
 - We are called to be children of God
 - We are called to belong to His body, the church
 - We are called to be witnesses of Him in the world
- These are not separate callings, but one integrated calling
 - If we belong to Christ as His children, then we belong to each other as His family – His body. As we belong to one another we corporately demonstrate to the world that we belong to Him by our love for one another.
- As a church we are to be united by:
 - Humble and gentle
 - Patient
 - Bearing with one another in love
- Our unity should not be superficial, but a genuine unity of the Spirit – a unity that comes from deep within by the grace of God and working of His Spirit within us
 - The Spirit of humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and love
 - Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- The Spirit in us tells us that there is one body, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- If we have differences of opinion or conflicts amongst us we need to deal with them in a mature way to resolve our differences and conflicts.
 - This is the why Christlike maturity, that we will be looking at later, is essential.
 - We need to recognise the body of Christ – the oneness of His body pervaded by His one Spirit under one Head, who is Christ
- We will see later that we can't have unity at all costs, as important as unity is.

2) Gifts of grace

- Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.
- It was after Jesus defeated his foes – the devil – on the cross and ascended into heaven that He sent the gifts of grace via the primary gift of the Holy Spirit
 - Acts 2:38-39 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off —for all whom the Lord our God will call."
- Each believer receives personal gifts of grace for the purpose of building up the body of Christ
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:24-25 God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

- Besides these the church is given people as ministry gifts to the church
 - Ephesians 4:11-13 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- The purpose of these gifts is threefold
 - Equipping the believers for works of service
 - Building up the believers to reach unity in the faith
 - Bringing the believers to maturity in the whole measure of the fullness of Christ
- How is our church doing against these purposes?

3) Christlike maturity

- Ephesians 4:14-15 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
- Christlike maturity is not about how gifted we are nor about our unity, but truth and character
 - The gifts can lead us to truth though gifted teachers
 - If we are based on the truth of the Word of God we won't be tossed back and forth and blown here and there by every wind of teaching
 - False teaching has often destroyed people's lives!
- Unity without truth is not true unity
 - We cannot be truly united with churches that preach false doctrines, or with cults, or other religions
 - It has to be a unity within the faith based on the truth of God's word
 - True unity is found in Christ alone
 - Ephesians 4:16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.
- Maturity of the church is seen in Christlike character
 - The whole measure of the fullness of Christ
- As the church matures and we behave in a Christlike manner towards each other we will have unity of the faith demonstrating to the world that we are truly disciples of Jesus.