

Program for Unity



Facing the Future (Part 18)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme, "Facing the Future."

Yesterday we studied the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23, which so clearly sets forth God's objective of unity. This is what Jesus prayed:

> "My prayer is not for them alone [the disciples then with Him]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message [that's all subsequent believers], that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

I pointed out that that kind of unity has got to be a visible unity. It's got to be something the world can apprehend with its senses. And that that kind of demonstrated visible unity of all believers will be the only testimony that will reach the whole world with the news that God sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world.

Today we're going to look at the program of Jesus to bring the church into unity. We'll turn to Ephesians 4:11-16, which speaks about the main ministries that Christ has set in His church and the purpose for which those ministries are set there. And this is what Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-16:

> "And He [that's the resurrected, ascended Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers [there's five main ministries: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Now we're told the purposes for which these ministries were set by Christ in the church, verse 12:] for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of

> the stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Again we see the necessity of having a vision. The vision of the completed, mature, properly functioning body is stated there by Paul in verse 16, it's the end to which everything that God is doing in the church is directed.

Now let's go back and pick up some of the salient features of that tremendously important revelation of God's program to bring the church into unity. Let me make certain practical and important points. First of all, when God wants to do something, He begins by finding men to do it. And so Jesus begins His program in the church by giving men to the church in these various ministries. Somebody said once that God uses men not methods. I'm not sure that's totally true. I do believe that God has some methods. I would amend it this way: It takes God's men to apply God's methods. I certainly agree that the first and the most essential thing is the kind of man that God wants. You see, God works through leaders and where there are no leaders to work through, the purposes of God are frustrated.

I'm always impressed by the record of God's delivering Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. We know from the record of Scripture that Israel were crying out to God in their sad plight for at least 100 years and God told Moses that He'd heard their cry but God didn't move to deliver them until He had a man whom He could trust and to whom He could commit the task and that man was Moses. And it took God 80 years to prepare Moses for that task. That shows to me what tremendous importance God attaches to having a leader before He'll commit Himself to a task.

Now, as we look at these ministries that are mentioned here: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, certain specific functions for them are stated. The first of all, to equip the saints for their service. It isn't God's purpose that the "full-time" ministers shall do it all, that's a misunderstanding which has crept into some churches, but it's God's purpose that those ministers shall equip the rest of the believers to do their work. And, in some sense, the minister who does it all is really frustrating the purposes of God. It's much more important to equip others to do it. So that's the first purpose, to equip the saints for the service.

The second is to build up the body of Christ. These ministries must have the vision of the completed body. All their labors and efforts must be directed to producing this body which is the ultimate vision and purpose of God.

The third purpose, which is the one most closely connected with what I'm speaking about today, is to bring us into the unity of the faith. Paul actually uses the words "until we all attain to the unity of the faith." He's speaking about the unity of the faith as an objective to which we must come. And it's dependent on these ministries functioning correctly in the church.

He also says something further, which is revealing about how we will attain to the unity of the faith. He says through "the knowledge of the Son of God." But the Greek word means really "acknowledging". It's not just an intellectual knowledge of Jesus as the Son of God, it's acknowledging Him, it's giving Him His right place in every part of the church and in every area of our own lives. And I do believe that is the path to unity that, as we acknowledge Jesus and give Him His rightful place and His preeminence in every area of our lives and in the church which is His body, everything else will fall into line.

You see, doctrine is not enough. Every doctrine of the New Testament centers in a Person and that Person is Jesus. Salvation requires a Savior, sanctification requires a Sanctifier, healing requires a Healer, and so on. So, it's not enough to have the doctrine. The doctrine must bring us into relationship with the person and when the person of Jesus is rightly acknowledged in His church, then everything else will fall into its due place and order around Him.

The fourth purpose for these ministries is to bring us to maturity and completeness. A complete body, every part there, every part doing its job. A mature body, not the body of a small boy or a young person but a mature, full-grown body.

Let me just briefly recapitulate the functions of those ministries: first, to equip the saints for their service; second, to build up the body of Christ; third, to bring us into the unity of the faith through the acknowledging of the Son of God; and fourth, to bring us to maturity and completeness.

Now I want to speak about our response to these ministries. As God sets these ministries in the church; and that, in a certain sense, is His sovereignty, His prerogative, to set the

ministries in the church, but the important thing for each of us is to determine how we will respond to these ministries. If we reject these ministries, if we are self-willed and stubborn, go our own way and do not submit to spiritual authority that God has set in the church, the result is stated by Paul in the 14th verse of Ephesians 4:

> "As a result [he says], we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming."

The implication is clear. If we do not come under these ministries and submit to their authority and obey their direction, we will continue to be spiritually retarded infants. We will be old in years but very young spiritually. We'll be subject to every form of deception, every kind of new doctrine that comes along we'll be carried hither and thither by, we'll never attain to stability or maturity or real responsibility. That's the penalty of refusing the ministries that God sets in the church.

On the other hand, if we submit to these ministries, then the result will be love and right relationships and growth to fulfillment. Paul sketches out the pathway to this goal in verse 15:

> "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him."

We have to get in right relationship to the ministries, to the authorities that Jesus sets in His church. And being in right relationship to those ministries will bring us into right relationship with our fellow believers. We'll be "speaking the truth in love" and as we speak the truth in love, under discipline and authority, we grow up. We cease to be spiritually retarded infants. And we grow up into Christ, He's always the ultimate, He's always the objective. And we become members of that whole body, which is fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies in which every individual part is doing its proper job and which, as a result, the body grows naturally out of its own inner resources and life. It says that this relationship established between the members promotes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

God has a vision. God has a plan. God has a program. First of all, we have to hear the prayer of Jesus. Then we have to commit ourselves to the purpose of Jesus. Then we have to submit ourselves to the authority, to the ministry that Jesus sets in His church. And then we have to come into right relationship with our fellow believer and become part of that total functioning body which is the objective of God.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the second main objective of God in bringing about the restoration of the church; that is, outreach.

Radio Program

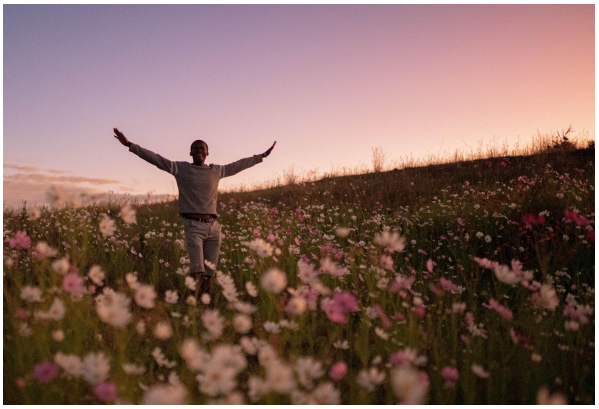
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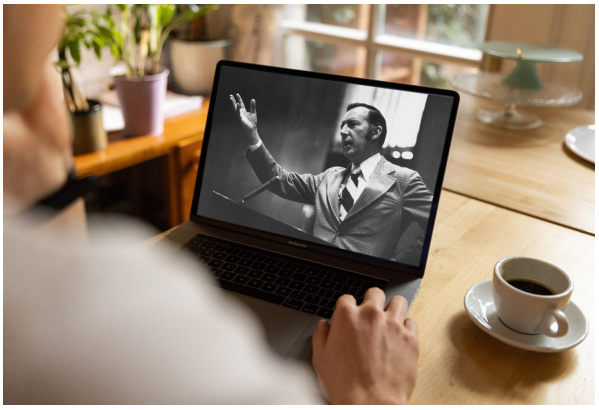
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