

"Role Players" Ephesians 4:1-16

Introduction

- Do you know why onions make you cry? The common onion, which is actually an herb from the lily family, contains volatile oils that give it its characteristic pungent taste. One of those components readily dissolves in water to produce sulfuric acid. So when we chop and peel onions, that's what burns your eyes and causing you to tear up and cry.¹

Transition

Every time this year, in churches all around the country, you can hear the sound of tears. Tears not from peeling or cutting onions, mind you. Tears from church leaders who are at their wits end begging and pleading and cajoling people to serve in all the new ministries starting in the fall. The **old adage is true!** 20% of the people in any given church do 80% of the serving. The sad truth is that many churches, including this church, are chock full of non-serving Christians. People either don't know their spiritual gifts or they don't know how to use them or they are too busy to use them or they haven't been given permission to use them and so they have become rusty from lack of use. Others are serving but in areas where they aren't gifted and without any joy. What most people don't realize is that when members of the body of Christ fail to serve, the local church and each individual Christian within it suffers. The unity of the body of Christ suffers. The church and each individual fail to mature. Not serving is masochistic; it's destructive to the body of Christ! Please listen to what I have to say to you this morning.

Proposition

- **Each Christian plays an indispensable role in maturing the body of Christ**

Transition

The reality is that Christians are called to serve; that's our indispensable role. **Rick Warren**, in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* says, "Growing up, you may have thought that by being 'called' by God was something only missionaries, pastors, nuns, and other 'full-time' church workers experienced, but the Bible says every Christian is called to service. Your call to salvation included your call to service. They are the same. Regardless of your job or career, you are called to full-time Christian service. A 'non-serving Christian' is a contradiction of terms."² Each Christian plays an indispensable role in maturing the body of Christ by serving! When Christians don't serve the body of Christ, the local church, does not mature. This morning, I want us to examine Ephesians 4:16-16 because in this passage, we clearly see the critically important role that each of us play.

Organizational Sentence

¹"Onion," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

² Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life*, p. 229.

- **Ephesians 4:1-16 explains two (2) responsibilities of each Christian as we work to mature the body of Christ**

Transition

One of the great truths mysteries of the Christian life is that you and I have the job of literally en-fleshing, putting skin and bones on things that are true spiritually.

Background and Setting (10:1)

- As we continue in Ephesians, this becomes very clear starting in our passage today. Remember, the first three chapters of Ephesians deal with the heavenly realities of being in Christ. Paul explains the mystery of the gospel and how Christ's death and resurrection enrich us spiritually. But what good is our faith if it only affects the spiritual and not the physical? That's not Christianity, that's Gnosticism. That's where the church comes into play. The church is the means by which the truths of chapters 1-3 are en-fleshed. Our passage this morning simply begins the section in Ephesians where Paul begins to explain how you and I must practically live out, en-flesh, the truths that he's taught us in the first three chapters.
- Last week we talked about how growing in our knowledge of God's love for us is what matures us. This week we are going to see how each of us has a responsibility to mature the body of Christ through Christian service. Here's how the two are interrelated. As we, *together with all the saints*, grow in our understanding of God's love for us, our hearts fill with love and gratitude for God. Biblically speaking, the natural expression of gratitude is Christian service. When Christians are grateful for their salvation, they serve. When each part of the body of Christ serves, they mature and the body matures. And the hallmark of Christian maturity within the church is unity. In other words, mature congregations physically and visibly manifest a unity of thought and spirit, a tangible expression of the unity that each of us has in Christ. And so it is by our service that each Christian plays an indispensable role in maturing the body of Christ, of bringing to life the unity that we already have in the spiritual realm in Christ.

Transition

I have a great vested interest in seeing this congregation mature. And so I want us to look at our first responsibility. Look at [verses 1-6](#). Our first responsibility is that [unity must be preserved at all cost](#).

Main Points

I. **Unity must be preserved at all cost (4:1-6)**

A) Validation

- i) The New Testament makes a very good case that the hallmark, the distinguishing characteristic, of mature congregations is their unity. Congregational maturity is dependent upon unity. Unity is not simply a lack of fighting. It's so much more than that. It's our calling. It's what we exist for. It's how we are to live. Because when

we live life together as one it points people back to our God who made us one together through Christ. Our first responsibility? **Unity must be preserved at all cost.**

B) Explanation

- i) Let me explain. Simply stated, [verses 1-6](#) are Paul's exhortation, his command to the Ephesian churches, to live life together as one. Being in Christ means being united to all kinds of people who are different than you. Through Christ, we become members of God's household, part of a spiritual building that is being built up. We become citizens together in a new nation. And so the command rings out. *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* Paul appeals, he pleads, he begs not that ministry positions would be filled but that those who are one in Christ would live consistently with their calling. "The adjective [worthy] has the basic meaning "that which balances the scales," or "equivalent.""³ In other words, balance the scales of your life. Make your physical life equal with your spiritual calling. Be united! Maintain, preserve, keep the unity that was produced when the Spirit of God came into your life and united you to Christ. Here's how. Be humble, be gentle, be patient and bear with one another, and love. Be humble, think less of yourself than the power and ability of God to work. Be meek, which is the gentleness of the strong. Be patient which is longsuffering towards aggravating people.⁴ Forbear, which is mutual tolerance.⁵ Love, sacrifice your life for one another. Live this way. No make every effort! In the words of [John Stott](#), "[this] excludes passivity, quietism, a wait-and-see attitude, or a diligence tempered by all deliberate speed. Yours is the initiative! Do it now! Mean it! You are to do it! I mean it! Such are the overtones."⁶ "Without these graces, which are essential to life together, there is no hope of maintaining the unity of the Spirit."⁷
- ii) We've gotta demonstrate this unity in our church because everything we are about is unity. It's our calling. That's why in [verses 4-6](#) Paul gives a sevenfold description of our indestructible unity brought about by God's saving work. Why must we forbear? And be patient? And love? And be meek? And be humble? Preserving unity with one another? Because *There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* **Unity must be preserved at all cost.**

C) Illustration

- i) You and I have a responsibility. We are like sugar in the canning process. We are like a salt cure. We are like creosote to a railroad tie.
- ii) By our actions or our inability to act properly toward one another we preserve or destroy the unity that the Spirit has produced in our lives.

D) Application

³ Reinecker, p. 530.

⁴ Reinecker, p. 530.

⁵ Stott, p. 149.

⁶ Stott, p. 154.

⁷ O'Brien, p. 279.

- i) Again, let me challenge you. These commands are all relational. Paul assumes in this passage that Christians are already involved in each other's lives. We have a more foundational problem. We aren't existing in relationship to one another as well as we should be. If you call yourself a Christian and yet have no consistent-spirit level connection to any other person in the body of Christ with whom you can forbear, and be patient, and love and be gentle and humble then you are living a hypocritical life, inconsistent with your calling as a Christian. To not live this way, to isolate yourself from the body of Christ because of busyness or any other reason is a slap in the face of Christ who has made us one.
- ii) Become part of a small group bible study. Get connected to people here at church. Serve with others. Invite others over for lunch and dinner. Invest yourself in each others' lives. Give of your time sacrificially. It's our responsibility to live this way. It's our role. It's our calling. It's living out the gospel.

Transition

Let's look at our second responsibility now. Look at [verses 7-16](#). As we live life together, we have the challenge of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. Along with the attitudinal commands of verses 1-6, the other way in which we maintain the unity of the Spirit is through our differences. Our second responsibility is to maintain our unity through the diversity of our Spirit given gifts.

II. Unity is built and maintained through a diversity of gifts (4:7-16)

A) Validation

- i) I believe that one of the reasons people fail to engage in meaningful, fulfilling, purposeful Christian service is because they underestimate the importance of that service. "The unity of the Spirit is maintained as the members of the body function together harmoniously for the well-being of the whole."⁸ That's the whole reason we've been given spiritual gifts; to maintain the wholeness, the oneness of the body. **Unity is built and maintained through a diversity of giftedness.**

B) Explanation

- i) As [Rick Warren](#) says, "What happens when one part of your body fails to function? You get sick. The rest of your body suffers. Imagine if your liver decided to start living for itself: 'I'm tired! I don't want to serve the body anymore! I want a year off to be fed. I've got to do what's best for me! Let some other part take over.' What would happen? Your body would die. Today thousands of local churches are dying because of Christians who are unwilling to serve. They sit on the sidelines as spectators, and the Body suffers."⁹ In [verses 7-16](#), Paul suddenly switches subjects to God's gift of grace given to us in the form of spiritual gifts. Why? Because the gifts of the spirit are given for the purpose of maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. Listen. *"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the*

⁸ Bruce, p. 336.

⁹ Warren, p. 230.

lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) Beyond saving grace, God gives grace in the form of spiritual gifts through the person of Jesus Christ. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 and applies that verse to Christ to make his point that Christ had the right to give gifts to men. This Old Testament quotation has at its heart the picture of a victorious military victory. As one commentator put it, “One may picture a military leader returning to Jerusalem at the head of his followers, after routing an enemy army and taking many prisoners. The victorious procession, with the captives in its train, makes its way up to the temple mount, preceded by the sacred ark, which symbolizes the invisible presence of the God of Israel. The conqueror, having received gifts from the defeated enemy, bestows them as largesse on the spectators lining the processional route.”¹⁰ Christ descended at the incarnation and ascended from the grave, victorious in his battle with sin, uniting us with him and giving gifts to enable us to maintain that unity in his absence.

- ii) That’s why [verse 11](#) says, *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God’s 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.* “Jesus taught that spiritual maturity is never an end in itself. Maturity is for ministry. We grow up in order to give out.”¹¹ We are all ministers of Christ Jesus, that’s what that word *service* means. Some, like the apostles and prophets, are given to found and establish the church. Others like evangelists are given so the message of the gospel might be announced faithfully. Some are pastors who teach and take care of the flock and some are teachers. But the purpose of their ministries is to prepare everybody else in the body of Christ for works of service. If we submit to this pattern of behaving as a church, two things are accomplished. Look at [verse 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.* Unity of faith and knowledge of the son of God. When we exercise our gifts, we mature by becoming united and by growing in our understanding of what God has done for us through Christ.
- iii) The result is that we mature. Look at [verses 14-16](#). *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 men in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 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.* “An obligation has been placed on the individual members of Christ’s body, that they no longer be infants.”¹² Infants are defenseless, unable to protect themselves, they are an easy prey for false teachers.”¹³ We move from infancy to maturity by serving, using our god-given gifts.

C) Illustration

¹⁰ Bruce, p. 341.

¹¹ Warren, p. 231.

¹² Bruce, p. 351.

¹³ Bruce, p. 351.

- i) How effective would an orchestra be if only one instrument, say a tuba, played? How effective would a tuba be at playing the part for the bass fiddle or the timpani? Or, how effective would an orchestra be if all the instruments were the same; let's say 100 oboes all blaring, bleating at the same time? Or how effective would an orchestra be if all the instruments were playing to peak capacity but at moment when the trumpet has a solo it's decided to take the night off?
- ii) And yet together, 100 diverse and unique instruments work together building each other up through their various sounds to produce a symphony.

D) Application

- i) Every single person in this church has a role. Ask yourself what is it? Do no more, do no less, do it with excellence. You were not created to take up space and warm the bench. Each of you has been given gifts by God's Spirit to mature the body and maintain the unity of the Spirit. It's simply not my job to do every ministry. My job is to prepare you to do ministry. I'm not the only minister in this congregation. Every single one of us has the same calling, ministers of Jesus Christ. That's why, if you look on the inside cover of your bulletin you will see something a little different.
- ii) The hard part for us to learn is what we are missing out on by not becoming the kind of church where everybody is involved using their gifts. We simply are shortchanging ourselves and each other. What we fail to see is that we actually destroy God's church when we fail to serve. The body can't be built up. It can't mature. It can't remain united. **Each Christian plays an indispensable role in maturing the body of Christ.**

Conclusion

- Unlike those onions that cause tears when they are prepared to be served, I urge you this morning to allow God to prepare you and use you without causing a stink. As Bruce and I, cooks in God's kitchen, work for your benefit, will you allow us to prepare you to do your job? Will you allow us to work and prepare a glorious feast for our bride Christ? Let us pray.