

The Body Built Up in Love – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul defines what it means for the body of Christ to be built up in love
2. aim – to cause us to understand who we really are before God and to choose to live as such
3. passage – Ephesians 4:17-24

b. outline

1. Love as Thinking Right (Ephesians 4:17-19)
2. Love as Putting Off the Old Self (Ephesians 4:20-22)
3. Love as Being Renewed in Mind (Ephesians 4:23-24)

c. opening

1. a peek into the **satire** of the *Babylon Bee*
 - a. “Local Calvinist Suspicious Of Any Sermon Mentioning God’s Love”

“BOISE, ID—Local Calvinist Evan Rollins loudly announced Sunday afternoon his increased level of discomfort and wariness with Pastor Frank after the minister preached a passionate sermon on the love of God, witnesses confirmed Wednesday. According to Rollins, he first began to feel uncomfortable with the message when the pastor quoted John 3:16 and pleaded with his hearers to believe the gospel, with his doubts and fears seemingly being confirmed as Pastor Frank reminded his audience that ‘God is love.’ ‘I’m just not sure about Pastor Frank anymore, with all the love and grace talk,’ Rollins told a friend at a local microbrewery after service. ‘I’m not saying he’s a heretic—or worse, an Arminian—but just that we should have our guard up from here on out. I’m seeing a lot of red flags.’ ‘Did you catch that bit about God’s love reaching to the heavens? Wow,’ he added. At publishing time, Rollins had begun searching for another church ‘where we’re really exhorted to rest in God’s wrath and judgment from the pulpit.’”
 - b. the satire is designed (of course) to warn about the possibility that Reformed Theology can be misconstrued as all about doctrine and theology, over *against* the love of God
 1. **i.e.** Reformed Theology is just as susceptible to an **imbalanced** focus as other systems of faith
 - c. but, a proper reading of the N.T. (particularly the letters of Paul) always brings that balance back into focus, if we are really willing to see it and to pursue it (**i.e.** proper theology is **balanced**)
2. a reminder of the **place** of this section of the letter
 - a. **remember:** Paul employs an indicative-imperative rhetorical structure in most of his letters
 - b. **Ephesians 1-3** is the **indicative** section of the letter
 1. **#1:** God decrees to adopt a people to himself and lavish them with his spiritual riches
 2. **#2:** God creates this people by raising them from their spiritual deadness to faith in Christ
 3. **#3:** God draws this people together into a new structure as living stones of worship to him
 4. **#4:** God purposes to use this work of decree and drawing to glorify himself in a cosmic drama
 5. these are the *truth statements* upon which Paul builds the point of his letter
 - c. **Ephesians 4-6** is the **imperative** section of the letter
 1. **#1:** the church (the body) is to be *unified* – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (4:4-6)
 - a. unified together in our shared *calling* – a unity of service and humility before one another
 - b. unified together in our shared *doctrine* – a unity of maturity in our understanding of truth
 - c. unified together in our shared *Lord* – a unity of commitment to the head, to Christ
 2. **note:** the entirety of the section is about the “*body*” being “*built up*” (**vv. 4, 12, 16**)
 - a. **v. 15** – to “*grow up in every way*” into Christ – into Jesus, who is the head of the body
 - b. **v. 16a** – it is Christ who “*makes the body grow*” – joined by every “*joint*” (individual) as each “*works properly*” (together)
 1. **i.e.** Christ uses every believer working in harmony with all others to produce the growth of the body – everyone working together brings about the mission of the church
 - c. **v. 16b** – so that it “*builds itself up in love*” – the result being a cohesive sense of love towards one another – an environment of *ever-increasing love* fostered between believers
 3. **question:** what does this “*love*” look like in the church – or, what does it mean for believers to love one another – or, what does love mean when it comes to the mission of the church?
 - a. **note:** it is this concept which *permeates* so much of Christian dialogue in the church
 - b. churches advertise themselves as being places where you can “*feel loved*” – where you can feel “*included, welcomed, in community, without judgment, openness, freshness, etc.*”
 - c. **is genuine Christian love a sense of emotionalism, or does it have a different core?**
 1. (**see Babylon Bee above**) is love **opposed to** (or opposite of) a doctrinal view of church life – that you can *either* pursue theology *or* pursue love for others, but not both?
 4. **Paul will use the rest of this letter to define the concept of Christian love, what it means to truly love one another (and [by ext.] the world) – what it means to be “built up in love”**

- a. **hints:** see 3:17, 19; 4:2, 15; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23, 24 – 5:2 = “walk in love, as Christ ...”
- b. first, he will make it clear where he stands on the connection of doctrine and love

I. Love as Thinking Right (Ephesians 4:17-19)

Content

a. the importance of thinking right (v. 17a)

1. “testify” = declare (as under oath); insist on; implore; lit. to summon as a witness to “take to record”
 - a. to speak in the public arena to the truthfulness of something, where that truth *has affect*
 1. **e.g.** in a courtroom, the testimony given has the affect of establishing guilt or innocence
 2. summoning forth the greatest of *truth* (imperative) before the reader – LISTEN UP!!

b. the core of thinking right (v. 17b)

1. “walk” = to live; to make choices and act upon them; lit. the forward progress of moving through life
 - a. life is a “walk” in that it is an active set of choices; it is a continuous sense of “moving forward”
 - b. **remember:** Paul began the imperatives in 4:1 urging his readers to “walk in a manner worthy”
 - c. **Paul is telling his readers that the Christian life is an active “moving forward,” not passive**
2. “Gentiles” = either 1) specifically, non-Jewish people, or 2) in general, outsiders or aliens
 - a. in this case, it would appear that Paul is using the word in the second sense, as people who are outside of the church, aliens to the truths of the gospel, non-participants in the faith
 - b. **note:** some have suggested that Paul is speaking here to his non-Jewish readers (see 3:1)
 1. but, there’s no reason to believe that Paul would “excuse” Jews from their ways of living
 - c. **Paul is telling his readers that not to walk like those outside of the faith**
3. “futility” = emptiness; vanity; pointlessness; uselessness; lit. having no effect
 - a. “of their minds” = the end result of thought that begins and ends in a secular worldview
 1. **i.e.** having much *intelligence* and *knowledge* (naturally, speaking), but unable to connect all of that “information” to something that *really matters* (in the end)
 2. **i.e.** the inability to truly find “meaning” in life within the pursuit of intellectualism (the “why?”)
 - a. why are we here, why is there disaster and evil, why can’t we all just “get along?”
 - b. **e.g.** the “Big Bang Theory” where *relationships* give meaning to the lives of the geniuses
 - b. **Paul is telling his readers not to walk like outsiders because it is nothing but futile thinking**

c. the futility of not thinking right (vv. 18-19)

1. they are “darkened in their understanding” = having no *revelation* to guide their cogitations
 - a. in the N.T., darkness has several meanings:
 1. the place where God is not present (**Matt. 25:30**, “outer darkness”)
 2. the holiness of God, his utter separation from evil (**Heb. 12:18**, “blazing fire and darkness”)
 3. the state of being without revelation (without light; **Matt. 6:23**, “full of darkness”)
 - b. here, it is that **third definition** – being unable to *truly* understand the creation as it relates to a Creator; an inability to connect reality to God (**Romans 1:19, 21f**)

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them ... For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools ...”
2. they are “alienated from the life of God” = unable to grasp the concept of “genuine living”
3. they have an “ignorance in them” = they have no knowledge of what is good or right or best
 - a. note the difference between *ignorance* and *stupidity* – stupid is the *physical inability* to understand, whereas *ignorance* is simply a lack of knowledge or access to it
 - b. **i.e.** Paul is not suggesting that unregenerate people are *stupid* – they are just ignorant
 1. although he is quick to note in **Romans 1:18** that this ignorance is **voluntary**
4. they have a “hardness of heart” (**i.e.** become “callous”; **v. 19**) = an *unwillingness* to see the obvious
5. they have “given themselves up to ...” = trying to find “fulfillment” (in sexuality, possessions, etc.)
6. **Paul testifies to this specific (contextual) truth: we must always think about (and act on) love as God understands it, not how the pagan world around us thinks of it**
 - a. **IOW:** we are not to adopt our definition of “love” through the lens of how pagans think – we are not to define *Christian* love on the basis of how the world thinks about “love”

“I’m not a smart man, but I know what love is” – Forrest Gump
 - b. the church is not to define what it means to love one another on the basis of *rank emotionalism*
 1. the world would have you to think that love is only an emotional *feeling* that needs to be nurtured
 2. **biblical love is a balanced relationship between the mind (in truth) and the heart (in emotion) – “speaking the truth in love”**
 - a. **e.g.** in election = God’s choice of his elect is predicated on his love for them (1 John 4:10)