

## Small Group Leaders Notes

### Ephesians 4:4-10

#### Context

- **v1-3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit**
  - In v1-3 Paul was urging the Ephesians to maintain the unity that the Spirit has established and which he has been explaining in the first three chapters. Now in v4-6 Paul wants us to be clear that he is not urging “unity at any price”. v4-6 show us that our unity as a church is to be grounded in our shared theology.
- **v11-16 - The reason why Christ has given us different gifts**
  - In v7-10 Paul will tell us that though we are 1 Christ has given us different gifts. The reason why Christ has given us different gifts/ portions of grace will only become clear in v11-16 where Paul will tell us that Christ’s desire is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature...” and that this will happen as “each part does its work.”
  - v7-10 are therefore key for understanding that the source of our different gifts is Christ.

#### Notes & Tricky Bits

*The passage naturally breaks into two parts; v4-6 and v7-10 (there will be a sermon on each of these.)*

- **v4-6 - We are One...**
  - The first thing to notice about these verses is the Trinitarian nature of our unity (notice the references to the Spirit (v4), the Lord Jesus/Son (v5) and the Father (v6).) In these verses Paul is “describing the unity that each of the three persons of the Godhead creates between Christians in God’s church” (Coekin.)
  - **One Body** - Paul has repeatedly stressed that Christians are part of 1 body, Christ’s body (1:23). Regardless of ancestors or ethnicity we are now joined together in one body (2:14-16.)
  - **One Spirit** - Paul mentions the Spirit before the Father and the Son because he has just been urging us to maintain the unity of the Spirit. All share in the same Spirit (2:18, 2:22). There are not different Spirit’s for different people, all have access to the same Father by the same Spirit.
  - **One Hope when you were called** - The idea of calling takes us back to the theme verse (v1) “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Remember that we were hopeless (2:120) but God has called us and given us the wonderful hope of eternal life (1:18.)
  - **One Lord** - Numerous times in the letter Christ is referred to as ‘ the Lord’. He is the one, under whose feet, God has placed all things (1:22-23). There really is only one Lord.
  - **One Faith** - The word faith can be used in different ways. We can talk about our personal faith or someone “coming to faith” in the sense of saving faith in Christ. Here and in v13, it refers to something that is defined (see also Jude 3.) There is really only

1 true faith because there is only 1 true Lord. This faith is defined and we need to be agreed on this faith for there to be unity amongst us.

- **One Baptism** - Again there is only 1 faith because there is only 1 Lord and there is only 1 body into which we are baptised. This is not talking about the precise mode of baptism so try and avoid a lengthy discussion over whether baptism has to be full emersion or not because that really is Paul's concern here.
- **One God and Father** - There is one God who is the origin, ruler and sustainer of everything and everyone in the universe. There is some debate over whether this should just be applied to Christians or more broadly to everyone and everything in the universe. For what it is worth I think that one of the repeated themes of Ephesians is how God rules over everything (not just his people) so I take this verse to be referring to everything and everyone in the universe. For example see 11:9-10, 1:20-23, 3:14-15.)
- **v7-10 - ... But we are Different**
  - ***“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...”*** - Every single Christian has been given some “grace”. The grace that Paul is referring to isn't saving grace but is additional grace in the form of gifts for ministry/service (see 4:12.) This grace isn't for us and our benefit but for the benefit of the rest of the body (4:12.) Cooking helpfully suggests that “these gifts of grace are not just abilities but ministries - ways for us to serve his church family.”
  - We need to recognise that it is Christ who has apportioned grace to each of us. He has determined and chosen to distribute his grace as he sees fit. This helps us to guard against pride as well as envy and inadequacy. It's Jesus' church and it's his grace. As we go on through chapter 4 we are repeatedly reminded that every part of the body is vital and we all need each other serving one another if we're to be built up and mature.
- v8-10 - These are not the easiest verses to interpret but we need to focus on the big thing in these verses. Paul is using this quote from Psalm 68 to emphasise the point that he made in v7 - Christ has risen and ascended and he is the one who has distributed different gifts to his people. It is this idea of giving gifts to his people that Paul will pick up on and expand in v11 and following.
- Psalm 68 - In the original context of the Psalm the quotation refers to God rescuing his people from Egypt (see Psalm 68:7-10 for example.) God in victory then gave his rescued people to the world as a gift. Israel were always meant to be a blessing to the world. Paul picks up the Psalm and sees it fulfilled in Christ who has won the victory and now gives each of us as gifts of grace to the church. As Coekin writes;  
  
*“We don't just have God's gifts. We are God's gifts to his church. So my church is not just there in order to bless me, as though I am a shopper filling my basket in the supermarket. The opposite is true: we're all saved and given to our churches as gifts to bless others by serving them. We are not meant to be consumers but contributors!”*
- **Ascended and Descended** - There are various different suggestions for what each of these refer to. The context of Ephesians helps us to be clear on what Paul means by each. He has already mentioned Christ's ascension in 1:20-23. Christ ascended to rule and it is in this sense of ruling that he fills the whole

universe (rather than in some semi-physical sense.) With regard to Christ's descent I think it is best to see this as referring to Jesus' incarnation and coming into the world rather than as taking this as a possible reference to his descent into death or hell. The big thing is to recognise that Paul is really focusing on Christ' ascent because that is when and how he distributes his gifts.

**Big Idea** - We are one in Christ but we are all different gifts of grace from Christ for his church

## **Applications**

### • **Unity**

- We need to recognise the importance of unity. In an age which celebrates diversity and individualism we could easily forget how important our unity is.
- We also need to remember where our unity comes from. As Christians we are united by God and our unity is to reflect the unity of the God who is Trinity. The church is to be like an orchestra playing a symphony. Just as an orchestra is made up of many different instruments so the church is made up of different people with different gifts and skills but they all need to be harnessed. Just as an orchestra needs every part playing to create beautiful music, so the church needs every part serving to be built up.
- We need to reflect on the foundation of our unity as a small group and as a church. When groups and churches are small it can be easy to be united by a shared background or culture instead of shared theology. As we grow larger it becomes more and more important that our unity is truly rooted in God and what he has done because we will increasingly come from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. It is often said that 'Doctrine divides', v4-6 show us that the opposite is true - "doctrine unites."

### • **Gifts**

- Every Christian has received some gift of grace from Jesus so as to serve the church. Everyone is a gift to their local church. Everyone has a part to play. Everyone is necessary if the church is to flourish and grow in maturity and faith.
- As we start to see this it should guard us against pride in thinking that we are more important than other people. It should also guard us against feeling inadequate or resentful because everyone else needs me.
- We also need to recognise that whatever gifts or abilities Christ might have given to us are not for our benefit. We often talk about "my gifts" but they are not really my gifts. They are Christ's gifts that he gives to the church. Each Christian is a gift from Christ to their local church. When we begin to grasp this it will turn us outward so that instead of focusing on ourselves when we come to church we're focused on everyone else and serving them. You might want to revisit some of the material we covered in 6 steps to loving your church which encouraged us to be involved in the ministry of the pew.

## **Bible Study**

*This passage will be covered in 2 sermons so there will be lots of sermon material that you can draw on. The following questions are merely a suggestion and you may want to pick and choose from them as well as using some of your own.*

**Starter - Think of an orchestra performing a symphony;**

**A. Why is unity so important in an orchestra?**

**B. Why is variety also so important?**

*The aim of this starter is simply to get us thinking about how both unity and variety are so important not just in church but in other areas of life. Hopefully introducing this image of the orchestra at the beginning of the study should allow you to refer back to it as you go through the rest of the study and consider the unity and variety in the church.*

**v4-6**

**1. There is much diversity in BEC (ethnicity, upbringing, Christian experiences etc) but what do all Christians share in common?**

*Here is a chance simply to recap v4-6. You might want to ask a few supplementary questions to make sure everyone understands each of the different terms.*

**2. Sometimes people say that, ‘Doctrine divides!’ How do you think that Paul would respond?**

*Whilst doctrine can be used to divide Paul clearly saw doctrine as a good thing that unites the church together. The repetition of One in these verses shows us this. The Spirit of truth creates unity in the truth - that’s the unity that really matters!*

**3. How important do you think it is that BEC is united in what it believes?**

*This question is closely tied to the previous question. If we are to continue to grow and embrace more people then our unity cannot depend on shared backgrounds and experiences. Instead it must come from being united in Christ. You might want to bring in the idea of the Orchestra at this point for why unity is so important.*

**v7-10**

**4. What has Jesus given to each Christian?**

*This is a straight forward observation question. You may need to help the ground understand what it means for Christ to apportion grace.*

**5. Why does Jesus give different portions of grace to each of us?**

*This isn’t favouritism on the part of Jesus or anything like that. Instead Jesus gives us different portions of grace so that we can all play different roles in building up the church. Feel free to dip into v11-16 at this point.*

**6. “We don’t just have God’s gifts. We are God’s gift to his church”**

**a) How does this change our attitude to ourselves and our gifts/abilities/skills?**

*Here we really want to explore the idea that my gifts are not really mine. They are Christ’s and they are the church’s before they are mine. This should mean that I’m less concerned, proud or discouraged by what “my” particular gifts might be.*

**b) How does it change our attitude to serving others in the church?**

*Again we begin to see that if I have particular gifts or skills or abilities from God they are not primarily for my benefit or enjoyment. Christ has entrusted them to me for the good of everyone else in the church. Serving is then not about me and what I get out of it.*

**c) How does it change our attitude to gathering on Sundays or as a Home Group?**

*Again this should lead us away from a consumerist attitude to church. Even when I come midweek, I might not be leading the study" but I come to serve others as I pray, chat and engage in the study.*

**7) In what ways could you be serving your group and the church?**

*Perhaps if your group is quite large you could split into 2s or 3s to talk about this and to pray for one another. Sometimes it can be hard to see what our gifts might be. Others who know us well can often see what we would be good at.*