

TOGETHERNESS?, EPHESIAN 4:1-16

AWED BY GOD #8

◆ A study reported in Psychological Science discovered that the "best" arguers are those who don't point their fingers. According to the study, the person who says "we" the most during an argument suggests the best solutions. Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill used statistical analysis to study 59 couples. Spouses who used second-person pronouns (you) tended toward negativity in interactions. Those making use of first-person plural pronouns (we) provided positive solutions to problems. The study concluded: "'We' users may have a sense of shared interest that sparks compromise and other ideas pleasing to both partners. 'You'-sayers, on the contrary, tend to criticize, disagree, justify, and otherwise team with negativity."

◆ There is nothing essentially impressive about people who don't play well with others whether its in the sandbox of the office. That's all around us. If the store clerk is rough with us, we walk away clutching our purchase but feeling a little jittery in our stomach. But when people do get along, and on top of that people who are not alike, but different – well, that captures our attention, doesn't it. And this is a picture of the Church that Paul lays out in his letter to the Ephesians. He shows us that...

◆ **1. My experience of God grows along with my experience of God's family members. v7-11**

◆ A. God has measured himself out over a large gamut of people! Did you know that the Baptists aren't the only people for whom God answers prayers? Did you know that Reformed churches aren't the only places where God's Holy Spirit shows up? The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit of

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Christ inhabits absolutely every believer! Yes, even that guy who prays with that funny laugh. Or that congregational singer who likes to sway, while stone cold stiffness feels more reverent to others. Let me show you a term in our text. The term is “measure”: μέτρον in Greek. It means “apportioned amount.” We read it in verse 7.

◆ “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Ephesians 4:7, NIV. Literally “grace has been give as to the measure of Christ.”

◆ We find it in 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 fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13, NIV.

◆ We find it in verse 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.” Ephesians 4:16, NIV. Literally, “as to the measure of each part doing it’s work.”

◆ (Have you ever torn a ligament? I have. In a college soccer tournament between Trinity and Calvin, played at Hope College in Holland MI. I went to block a shot on goal with my left foot and landed sideways on my ankle, tearing a ligament. Just one little ligament. I could hardly walk for 8 weeks! What happens when a family ligament tears. I’ll tell you: the family hobbles.

◆ A measurement, or a portion is a certain amount. In the Church, a certain amount of God’s goodness. God grace in the world is measured out over

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his entire family, the church universal. That includes people of different eras, and different countries, and different traditions, and different looks. They, we, are all united by the same Dad.

◆ *“There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

Ephesians 4:4-6, NIV.

◆ B. In other words, because of Dad, we are family. Does anyone here like cinnamon? When was the last time you poured a spoonful of cinnamon into your mouth? Probably never. Cinnamon smells great. It tastes great. But not alone! A little sprinkle on the whip cream floating above my latte is delightful. That same sprinkle on my tongue...not so much. A little bit mixed into my pancake is special. Or take a Subway sandwich, or a Chipotle burrito. We don't take them home and then eat all the separate parts one at a time. It's the mix that makes it great! The Church is the same way. Paul is telling us that God gives his grace in a mix, and that's an awesome thing when people get to see it. Peter says the same thing...

◆ *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.” 1*

Peter 4:10, NIV.

◆ I will never forget how one young teacher in our church in Highland was talking one day with a girlfriend about needing some help at their home. Then she said something like this: “Oh, I'll just get people from church to help me.” Her girlfriend was astonished. She had no group in her life that she could imagine calling on for help in an instant. So she started coming

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to church with this lady. And she shared this story on the day she joined the church. Over the years I watcher this new Christian become a leader in our VBS, sing on a praise team, and various other services to the family. Remember, the whole letter to the Ephesians is about how awesome God is. How gracious our salvation is. And now he's pointing at God's family as the ultimate illustration. That also means then that...

◆ **C.** Behaving exclusively narrows my soul, and my experience of God. v12-13 . Maturity as a believer in Christ cannot come alone. Character is built in community, together. You cannot grow up as a follower of God keeping to yourself.

◆ *“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 fulness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13, NIV.*

◆ How many ways do we behave exclusively? We behave exclusively when we let labels divide us. Your a “Mennonite”? A “Quaker”? Well, I'll just be going over here a bit... Wait a minute. Quakers do more than sell oats. They serve Jesus. We behave exclusively when dislike fellow Christians with different tastes. Look at the variety of music in our world alone! There are churches that use country style music. There are churches that use an organ. There are casual dressers. There are suit and tie churches. No danger there. But satan comes in and suggests things to our psyche like, “Aren't they a little weird? Aren't you glad you don't go there?” And the soul narrows along with the slit in our eyes. We behave exclusively when we only talk to the same people at church, or stand in our same circle alone. You see friends, it is the nature of Christ, and the nature of mature

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Christians to reach out and into the lives of the unknown. To seek out new friendships. To pray for others. To watch for needs.

◆ At the beginning of this service some of you were handed a card with piano keys on it. Would each of you join me up here by the piano. One key on your card is marked. I'd like you to find it anywhere on the piano (there are more than one that are the same) and begin tapping it with your finger when you do. (let this take place). Now I'd like you to line up left to right according to the number on your card. Find your keys and push them all at the same time. Thank you. All kinds of sounds. All kinds of parts of the body. But arranged all together they make something nice. That's what the Church is meant to be. God's music in the world.

◆ At this point you might be wondering, OK then, how can I be in a way that helps create this unity. We've begun to answer this but lets go back to our text.

◆ 2. When I am self-denying, I create unity. v1-3

◆ **A.** What if the steamed milk in the latte yelled, "No, drink me separately! Have a whole cup of me, steamed milk!" How often does Starbucks sell a cup of steamed milk? I rest my case. It's just not that good alone. What's the quickest way to get along with other people?

◆ *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:2, 3, NIV.*

◆ What are these words? Humble: ταπεινο-φροσυνης. It means a mind that's low to the ground. Can you put your mind down by the ground

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so other's can be important to you? Patient: μακροθυμια : a lot - suffering, taking it a long time. Bearing: ανεχω to be/have/receive again and again. Are we getting the picture?

◆ All the opposites of these break people up! If you are proud, harsh, easily offended and tend to put people in their place, don't take no nonsense from nobody -you will not have much unity. That goes for small groups, marriages, families, clubs, sports teams, and in the Church.

◆ **B.** How can I be self-denying? Glad you asked. One primary way of being self-denying is to serve others with your giftedness. The hallmark of the Body of Christ, according to the New Testament, is it's willingness to live with and for others, to "love your neighbor."

◆ "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." Ephesians 4:7, NIV.

◆ There is a view of the Church that actually kills the church. Paul gets at it in verses 11-12. He talks of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. And sometimes church members say to themselves, "Ah the work of the church is to be done by the professionals. The pastors, the apostles, or the staff, etc. But that is not what the Bible says, is it?

◆ *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" Ephesians 4:11, 12, NIV.*

◆ Here's an essential truth that people easily miss: church leaders are feeders and equippers but the body can only grow when God's people do their parts. That by the way is one of the things I love about this family here

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at Sunrise. So many of you are doing distinct parts such that a lot of the time we don't know who did them! There are these lovely plant and floral arrangements outside the front door. For the longest time I thought the flower fairy was changing them out until one day I caught Scott Abney in the act or arranging! When we observe your portion of God's grace in action, it fills our hearts. Hope grows.

◆Where, my friends, might God be calling you to serve. How might Jesus suggest you practice some self-denying.

◆**Conclusion:** Friends, the Church was meant to rehearse what God intends for the whole world. To be a massive object lesson and preview of what happens when Christ comes again to reconcile all things in himself. Mark Buchanan has pointed out that we are not a community that never disagrees, some utopian colony of "yes men". Rather, we speak the truth in love. Nor is the church supposed to be a community of conformity - where we all look the same, sound the same, and think the same. Let me quote him.

◆God has set things up in such a way that if anyone asks, "What is Jesus like? Who is Jesus? Is he loving? Is he good? Is he just? Is he generous? Does he comfort the oppressed? Will he confront the oppressor?" — all they will have to do is look at the church to get the answer.

◆As I was preparing this message, a friend of mine shared with me a story that I think captures the picture of what Paul is saying about God's awe as seen in his family, the church. There is a small church in Washington state. Years ago, a young Church of Christ congregation was starting up on one side of town. Other the other a Church of the Brethren was aging. People from the two got connected and decided to share the building and become

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a church together. But, one of them had the tradition of the Lord's Supper every week, while the other practiced it twice a year, complete with foot-washing to boot, of the whole congregation! Furthermore, while they agreed that the preferred method of baptism was complete dunking under water, one group did one dunk backward, while the other practiced three dunks forward, in good trinitarian fashion. What were these two groups to do? Let me cut to the chase. Today that church is still going strong. They have communion every week and twice a year do the whole foot-washing thing too. They'll baptize anybody who loved Jesus, and you can pick 1 back, or three forward, whichever you like. I think that's beautiful especially considering the fact that people have actually split churches arguing over these issues and lesser one many times! Which brings us back to the study about arguers that we began with. Try not to point fingers and use the term "you" to address your struggles. There's statistically more health in "we." Maybe that's why the Bible talks that way.