

**Question #3: Practical Implications of Ephesians 4:1-11**

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Ephesians chapter four, verses 1-11, has profound practical implications regarding both the unity of the church today and the role that Christian leaders should play in bringing about the maturity of the church. Chapter 4 is a major turning point in Ephesians. It creates a transition from material meant to encourage the believers and remind us about all God has done for us, into parenetic material, exhorting us to live godly lives.

Reading the letter up to chapter 4, we are all freshly reminded about God's intention to use the church as a vehicle to display his wisdom to the universe (3:10) and the means by which he will gain glory on earth (3:21). The first exhortation following this high and lofty language is for us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the church. It strikes me that the first exhortation regarding how to walk worthily of this high call of God is one regarding the oneness of the body. Even though we are to live holy lives that represent God, the first thing out of Paul's mouth in this section is concerning the church. This makes me realize how important the unity of the church is to God.

As if just such an exhortation is not enough by itself, Paul then goes on to mention seven foundational items of unity on which the church is built. The very existence of the church is based on these fundamental items, which bring us back to our roots in God. These items listed in 4:4-6 loudly proclaim that the church can only be one in both essence and practice. This is an inspiration and encouragement personally for me to 'bear with one another in love'. Love, forbearance, and humility should be some of the outstanding virtues of my character. It is also convicting in a corporate sense for the Christian church because it exists with and tolerates so much outward division and inward strife among its various constituents.

This is where the role and functioning of Christian leaders and teachers are supposed to come into play. The next section (4:7-11) immediately starts talking about how gifts of grace

were given to each member of the body. These gifts are what constitute the Christian leaders in the church, including the pastors and teachers. These gifts come from the one God who intends to preserve the unity of his people. These leaders are the very ones who are supposed to promote the unity of the body by their ministering to each member (4:12-13).

It is critical that Christian leaders at every level see this vision concerning the importance of the unity of the body of Christ and instruct those in their congregation to work toward peace in the church at large. Certainly this does not mean at the cost of giving up the foundational truths of the gospel; Paul mentions that we should not be babes tossed around by every wind of teaching (4:14). But it does mean that leaders teach the saints to value the oneness of the body above and beyond trying to win every little argument about non-essential doctrines. Students take on the values of their teachers. Church leaders have a great influence on the attitudes of their congregation and on what is valued by members in the church. If church leaders do not understand the importance of the unity of the church as spoken of in Ephesians 4:1-11, then it would be almost impossible to expect the members of the body to understand or value this most crucial teaching. As an attitude of unity starts among the leaders of the church, then it can spread to the whole body.