

Building on the Rock

Ephesians 4:1-16

How can this study help me?

Do you remember the story of the Three Little Pigs and the Big, Bad Wolf? The moral of the story was it pays to build the strongest house because trouble will always come.

This part of Ephesians tells us that being united and building on strong foundations is more important than we recognise. The church at Ephesus was not always a happy place. We know from the last occasion that Paul spoke to the elders (leaders) of the church there, that he prophesied some of them would bring trouble (Acts 20:30,31). By the time he writes to Timothy the church had real problems (2 Tim 2:14-19). It is worth asking how much of this section did they take to heart? Will we today take it to heart?

What is going on in this section?

- How many times is there a reference to the body/love in this section?

The threat to unity (4:1-6)

- Go back and review the story about the foundation of the church in Ephesus in Acts 19. What potential problems would there be in achieving a sense of community (body) and a practice of compassion (love) between self-righteous, moralistic Jews who had practised exorcism and proud Greeks who had practised sorcery and the lascivious worship of Artemis? How would you build a common foundation so that both groups could grow?
- What sort of situation does Paul anticipate in the words of 4:14? If you take Paul's prophecy in Acts 20:29,30 seriously, what might be the source of "the deceitful scheming"? How would this situation compromise the unity?
- Why is lack of unity amongst the Ephesians particularly poignant for Paul when he is in prison? (3:1; 4:1)
- There is "one Spirit" (3), "one Lord" (Jesus Christ, v. 5; cf., 1:2) and "one God and Father of all" (6). Is it possible to have unity if there is disagreement or uncertainty about the Trinity?

The foundation of unity (4:7-16)

- Now if the background to this section is elders/leaders pursuing their own corrupt agenda, how does Christ's "grace" gifts in vs 11-14 help the situation? There are several ways of seeing this list, but what unites these various roles?

- Why do you think Christ's words are not enough and he organised a subsequent wave of teaching?
- The gift of Christ is to create a teaching culture or an attitude of service? What (work of) service does Paul have in mind in 2 Cor. 8:4 and Acts 6:1? Why do you need the roles of v11 to equip people for what seems to us obvious?
- What do works of service have to do with the body (4:4, 12, 16) and love (4:2.16)?
- Can you think of similar story that Jesus told about two houses and two foundations? (Hint: think Sermon on the Mount.) What is the background to Jesus speaking this way, and how is this similar to this section?
- Paul doesn't talk about unity in a religious order, a worship service nor does he suggest Christ's gift creates a hierarchical organisation. He could have talked of the church but he doesn't. Instead he talks of the outcome, what he envisages as a 'body.' In what ways is Paul's image of a body like a sports team?

What about us here and now?

- If you were trying to describe a local church to someone who only had the model of a hierarchical organisation, what help do you get from these verses?

So what do I do?

- Today many would say we don't have all of these gifts from Christ. If you concede they are right to a significant degree, what do we have instead?
- How do you respect the writings of the apostles and what does Christ do in our midst today?
- Can you grow in maturity as God's person/people without other Christians?