

*Sunday 21 March 2010. 10.30 am. JTH.
BOB: Building Outreach Belonging x12.*

Variety in unity – unity in variety.

***Intro verse 19.* Paul is addressing the church at Ephesus and as a strict Jew is looking with delight and amazement at a cosmopolitan group of people that at one point he would never have anything to do with. He's talking to the "rest of the world" that is not Jewish! At one point his experience would have largely focussed in on his people – the Hebrews but now he knows that God has directed him to go to the rest of the world – the Gentile world and what's more that this is God's secret plan unfolding. He is not calling the world to become Jews but to come to Jesus!**

Read Ephesians 2: 20 – 3: 11.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul is therefore appealing to God's people to work at becoming all that God has planned – God's plan (1:10) is to bring all of creation together through Jesus Christ. This plan – which can only be called a plan for the unity of the human race (as well as the whole of creation) is to be modelled in the Church for the heavens and earth to see. This oneness – this togetherness is pictured in 3 ways by Paul – a united and functioning body, a bride prepared for her husband and significant to our theme a building. (Read Eph 2: 21 & 22)

God's plan Paul says is an eternal plan (relates to all of time and beyond) but it was in his generation that the full extent of the plan to include all peoples and nations was revealed. (3: 1 – 11) It is this plan that Paul is writing about and the Church has chosen to place within the canon of Scripture to bind us for all time. Every generation of humanity must read this and the church must live by it and make it happen with the strength and supranatural power of the Holy Spirit. We must explain in words what people see enacted in front of them – God is building a multi-coloured, multi racial fellowship of people. We must never accept any form of apartheid within the church – we must strive to experience the wisdom of God – we God's people must long to display the wisdom of God's message.

God has planned to display his wisdom through his work in Jesus Christ – who draws people out of every nation and people group of the world to make into one new people. (This is what Jesus was doing that first Easter – he was lifted up to draw all people to himself). Again and again in Ephesians Paul goes back to this plan.

Here in 3: 10 Paul declares that God actually displays his WISDOM for all to see. In fact the wisdom of God is displayed for the rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly realms to see. This wisdom is displayed in the world where the church lives and works in community but is infact visible (it's a vast canvass) for all the angelic powers (those faithful to God and those fallen from God) to see and marvel. Some commentators (e.g. Stott) stress the angelic viewing of God's wisdom in the Church and others (e.g. Barth) stress that earthly political

powers and rulers see this display and it is for them to be convinced of God's wisdom displayed in the church.

God's wisdom says Paul is multi-coloured! He picks his words carefully and here is no exception – Paul himself I think is still amazed at God's actions. God's plan is so much bigger and all encompassing than the little world of one people group or nation. God's wisdom is not just “black and white” in its limits – it is all encompassing and has many facets and colours. Becca read to us a short poem by *Gerard Manley Hopkins called Pied Beauty. Glory be to God for dappled things* – When I think of “piebald” I always think of the ponies of the “cowboy and Indian films” where the ponies of the Indians were always piebalds with black and white patches – but in fact “piebald” refers to patches of many colours – motley, heterogeneous. – So Joseph's coat in the OT could be described as multi-coloured or piebald!

Paul is describing God's wisdom in making the Church as multicoloured wisdom – somehow the Church itself displays something of the nature and wisdom of God. It gives a message therefore for every human being and group is in the image of God but also God plans that they interrelate and function together. (God's wisdom is multi-coloured or “manifold” – polupoikilos as is the church.)

I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony was the message on our TV screens in the early 1990's as people from all the nations moved across the green slopes holding bottles of coke – but it is of course Christ not coca-cola that really unites the world!

Building anything with people who are not always able to fit snugly alongside one another is never easy. People's characters alone make that difficult (people are the weakest link!): people do not join the church perfect – some are shy, some aggressive, some sluggish others hyperactive and so on (*Building with Bananas, Derek and Nancy Copley, 1978 – people problems in the church*). But Paul is not here talking about people's different characters and character flaws that after all can be changed somewhat and sanctified – he is talking about people's nations, cultures, political and religious backgrounds.

Paul is describing in much the same way as someone would describe the colours of a landscape, a colourful carpet or a garden of flowers, the way God's wisdom is to draw together through Jesus Christ all the peoples of the world into one building for God to live in by his spirit.

In the same way as a stained glass window is designed, planned and constructed – God has designed and planned to reclaim, draw together and construct in the shape of the Church a glorious window which will display his wisdom. God has chosen to take varied, piebald, irregular and even broken and damaged people and weld them together to form something which when he the God of Light shines through will show even the heavenly rulers his wisdom.

The church as a multi racial, multi cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. No other human community resembles it. Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society. John Stott in p123 “God's new Society”.

Of course that statement could be challenged....There are other communities as large – maybe not as diverse? The Islamic community would be one. But John Stott says it is not just diversity but harmony that makes us unique. Is this true – do we shine out as a stained glass window the unity and harmony in the wisdom of God? Here is the challenge. If we are the “true multi coloured wisdom of God” drawn together by Jesus Christ do we display through our joined variety and diversity of race and culture that we are together united and in harmony with the will of God. (We long that one day all the Abrahamic peoples – no all the peoples of the world will come to Christ Jesus and be built together into one building in which God lives by his Spirit.)

The challenge is that we may be obedient to God’s plan of wisdom revealed to draw together all peoples through Jesus Christ. God’s plan is to weld us together in love – each human flaw or rough corner to be welded with love as people work together for God. Then using many coloured people (and always broken fragments of people) God will display his wisdom. For this we have to co-operate. We have to as we’ve been saying practice forgiveness, and acceptance of variety. We need to show humility, mercy and justice. The church is created through the power of God’s Spirit – gentleness and kindness and truth speaking and not through enforcement. This way of living as Jesus has shown can draw together a multi coloured people. Even the hosts of heaven, the powers in this world will see this as God’s wisdom. They may submit to God and become a part of his plan or they may resist it.

In each local church, in every small group or cell which gathers around Jesus and follows him as Lord God will be doing this work of piecing together and displaying his multi coloured wisdom. Something of brokenness of humanity, brokenness in human relationships – can be used by God to become a thing of beauty and therefore great power to change others. All this work can be a display of God’s wisdom and lead to praise being given to him.

Some questions to think about: Ephesians 2:19 - 3:11 God’s Multi Coloured wisdom is displayed in the Church – variety in community. Building a kaleidoscopic community! Paul spoke of God’s secret plan to extend his blessing to the Gentile world.

➤ ***God’s wisdom is described as “multi-coloured”. What is meant by this?***

➤ ***How can great variety in the church become a thing of beauty and therefore a power for good?***