

The Pronouns Preach: Lessons on the Glory of the Church

Jim Elliff

When reading the Bible, parts of speech make a big difference in our understanding. There are many examples, but here is one that demonstrates my point perfectly. It is found in Ephesians. I will be so bold as to say, “If you miss the pronouns, you miss the entire meaning of the epistle,” and you will miss a particularly important lesson we need today.

An Illustration

Ephesus was a center of pagan worship boasting one of the seven wonders of the world, The Temple to the Goddess Artemis. This temple was more than twice as large as the Parthenon in Athens, and attracted many from all over the known world. There, in that great city, was the church God had birthed, made up of Gentile-born believers and Jewish-born believers.

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The Ephesian church is one the most talked about churches in the Bible. We have two accounts of Paul’s journeys there in the book of Acts, and Paul’s letters to Timothy concerning the same church. We also read of the church at Ephesus as one of seven Christ speaks to in the first part of Revelation. Finally, we have an entire letter by Paul to them.

Among so much that Paul wishes to say to these people, one thing stands out in the book of Ephesians—although they came from extremely diverse backgrounds, they *must* learn to live together as believers.

“You” and “We”

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians assumes their great diversity, which comes to us in the form of his use of pronouns. When Paul speaks of “we,” he mostly means, “we who were born Jews but are now believers.” When Paul uses “you,” he mainly means, “You, the Gentile-born believers.”

Though the pronoun distinctions show up in the very first chapter, we perhaps can see it easiest in chapter two. Notice how this works:

And YOU [Gentile-born believers] were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which YOU formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Now see the shift in the next verse:

Among them WE [Jewish-born believers] too all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging in the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath EVEN AS THE REST.

Now he brings both groups together by using “we” and “us” for all of them:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved US [Jewish born and Gentile-born believers together], even when WE were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive TOGETHER WITH CHRIST . . .

Get it? Paul is preaching his great theme with these pronouns. The letter explains how Jewish-born believers and Gentile-born believers are brought together in Christ (chapters 2-3), and how Jewish-born and Gentile-born believers *live* together in Christ (chapters 4-6).

So What’s the Point?

Let’s put it this way. God’s receives glory from the church which He has made up of people of diverse backgrounds. In fact, He displays this glory to heavenly beings because it magnifies His grace. Diversity in the backgrounds of believers is something the church should aim for because it screams out praise to God.

Ever think of church life like this? This means that we should not seek to only bring one kind of Christian together in the churches. Rather, we should seek to cooperate with God in displaying His glory through our diversity. Paul is so burdened about this that he devotes much of almost every letter he writes to work on it. He simply refused to build a Gentile-born church on one side of town and a Jewish-born church on the other. They *had* to come together, because the gospel and God’s grace were on display. Only complete inability to speak the same language should make us separate.

So, you may be a “cowboy” church, but you better not *try* to be a cowboy church. You may become a wealthy church, but you better not *try* to be a wealthy church. You may be a church that has only one age group or one racial background, but you must never *try* to be such a church. If so, you are stealing away the glory of the church and are forsaking one of the most often repeated emphases of the New Testament. Don’t do it.

Let the pronouns preach.

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