

August 2, 2015 – Ephesians 4:1-16 (OT: Exodus 16:2-15 NT: Acts John 6:22-35)

Christ, the Head of the Church, Has Given Has Given Everyone a Role in His Body, the Church

In the secular world, a company often reviews its mission statement and goals every year. This gives it the chance to evaluate how well it is achieving these goals and to make any necessary changes to help it reach them. In the same way it can be good for a church do a similar review. Unlike a business, however, we do not turn to a man-made vision statement for guidance, but to God's word. The vision that God has for His church that we consider today was written to the church in Ephesus through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:1-16.

What stood out to you when you read these words? What would you say is the goal that God has for His church here? What stood out to me is the word "unity". Verse 3 says that we are to endeavor "*to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" Verse 13 gives us the goal that "*we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*" God wants us to be united in peace around the truth of His word, especially in the knowledge of the salvation that we have through His Son, Jesus Christ.

God not only shows us this goal for His church, but He also shows us how He wants us to achieve it. A pastor plays an important role this plan, but not the only role by any means. God tells here us that He has given pastors to His church to equip the saints for the work of the ministry (v. 12).

It may be tempting to put a comma after the word "saints" so that pastors are to equip the saints, to do the work of ministry, and to edify the body. It is certainly true that pastors do all three of things, but that is not what God is saying here. The role of a pastor is to equip all the members to do the work of ministry, and the purpose of this ministry (which we all carry out) is to build up the body of Christ – to build up one another. Each and every one of us has an important role given by God.

We do not all have the same role, however. This is brought out by a striking contrast. After talking about the unity of the Spirit that we have, and reminding us that there is "*one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,*" God goes on to say: "*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift*" (v. 7). We have the unity of the Spirit but a diversity of gifts and abilities (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-7). God has given to each of us various gifts to use to further His kingdom and build up His body, the church. As we see here, the work of a pastor is to equip you for your work of ministry.

But how does a pastor equip the saints? Again, God gives us His plan. A pastor equips by teaching. If you look at verse 11 pastors and teachers are linked. We often separate these two offices in our minds because we have separate training programs and calls for pastors and teachers, but there is a lot of overlap between the two. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 God gives the qualifications for pastors. The things listed there are things that could describe every Christian, except for one: and that is being "*able to teach*" (1 Timothy 3:2). That is a special calling and requirement for a pastor. That is not to say that others are not able teach, but it is by teaching God's word, the word written by the apostles, prophets and gospel writers God has given us that a pastor equips the saints. This teaching is important because there is a real danger that faces us all.

The goal God gives us in our work is that we "*grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*" (v. 15) and "*no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine*" (v. 14). Where do you see yourself on this continuum? Are you more like a child

tossed to an fro? Or are you closer “*a perfect man*” who has attained “*to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*”?

We would like to think that we are mature. We would like to think we would never be tossed to and fro. “I have been a life-long Christian, how can you say here, Paul, that I still need to grow up!?! Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.” Do those last words sound familiar? It is what Peter said in the upper room on the Thursday night before Jesus was arrested and put to death (Mark 14:29). We know the rest of that story, how Peter did in fact deny His Lord and Savior and claimed that he didn’t even know Him.

The book of Proverbs warns us, “*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18). God puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:12: “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.*” We should not be confident in ourselves and in our own ability to stand against the devil’s “*cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting*” (v. 14). God tell us to “*Be sober, be vigilant; because [our] adversary walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8).

But as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:11, we are not ignorant of Satan’s schemes. I have often wished that Paul had elaborated on that. He doesn’t stop there and give us a handy list of the devil’s devices. But it is true that we do know his tricks. Probably his most common tactic, and perhaps the most successful, is the one we see in the very beginning. When that serpent of old came to Eve, what did he say? He asked: “*Did God really say...?*” (Genesis 3:1). The devil’s plan of attack hasn’t changed in the past 6000+ years. He wants us to question what God says, or at least doubt what God says. We see the effects of this on many churches around us: “*Did God really say that baptism saves?*” “*Did God really say that the bread and wine are Christ’s body and blood?*” “*Did God really say that marriage is only between one man and one woman?*” “*Did God really say that Jesus is the only way to heaven?*”

We may have no trouble answering these questions here today, but can we say that we will never be swayed by Satan’s continual chipping away at our foundation in God’s word? That is why God wants us to be continually speaking the truth in love (v. 15) to one another so that we will not be “*carried about with every wind of doctrine*” (v. 14) and fall prey to the devil’s deceptions.

It is a pastor’s job to equip by teaching, but notice again, that we are *all* to be speaking the truth in love. God’s word is *our* great heritage, not just the pastor’s; it given to us all to use to encourage one another and build one another up.

This also means that you should not just take your pastor’s word as the absolute truth, but test what he says to make sure that it agrees with God’s word. Have the attitude of the Jews in Berea who eagerly received the words of Paul “*and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Do this (and all things) as God here instructs: “*with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love*” (v. 2).

These instructions to bear with one another in love are for us all, not only for a pastor dealing with those in his care. It is God’s will for us in dealing with one another, and even for congregation dealing with their shepherd. There is no such thing as a perfect pastor, except for the Good Pastor – the Good Shepherd – Jesus Christ. We all still have our sinful flesh and fall short of the perfection that God desires. I am no exception, nor is any other pastor. The Apostle Paul himself said, “*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice*” (Romans 7:19). We all sin. But when sin rears its ugly head, may we all bear with one another in love and rejoice in the forgiveness that we have through Christ Jesus our Lord.

When you look at God's plan for His church in these verses, does it seem like an impossible task? How can we live up to this vision that God has for His church? Verse 1 points us to the answer: "*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...*" The key is the word "therefore". Professor Joel Gullerud at Immanuel Lutheran High School once told me that a professor, I don't who he said it was, taught him that when you see this word in the Bible, you should always ask: "What is the 'therefore' there for?" And that is a good question for us to ask here.

Chapter 3 ends with these words: "*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen*" (Ephesians 3:20-21). It is because God is able to do far more than we can ask or think that Paul can therefore ask us to walk worthy of our calling. It is God who works in us and enables us to live as He here describes. It is God's power that works in us to glorify Him in the church.

We see that it is God's work in us that enables us to fulfill His vision for His church throughout our text. We see that is God who has called us to this calling. It is not one we have taken upon ourselves. Since it is God who has called us, He will give us, and has given us, all that we need to carry out His calling.

We are to endeavor "*to keep the unity of the Spirit*" (v. 3). This unity is not one that we manufacture, but one that we already have. We are simply to keep and guard it. It is the unity that comes from the Holy Spirit whom God has poured out into our hearts. It is "*the unity of the faith*" – the faith that God has given us, the unity that is based on the truth of His word given to us through the apostles and prophets and evangelists that God has given His church.

The peace and hope that we have come from God through His only begotten Son, whom He sent to reconcile us to Himself. Paul here reminds us of this when he writes that Jesus "*also first descended into the lower parts of the earth*" (v. 9). Jesus came down from glory to live among us. He fulfilled the law for us by living the perfect life of obedience to God that none of us have lived. He was obedient even to the point of dying on the cross to pay for our sins and take away our guilt. We were captive to sin and death, but Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death by rising from the dead. He has "*led (our) captivity captive and [has given] gifts to [us] men*" (v. 8). He has given gifts to each of us to build up His body, the church. And He "*ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things*" (v. 10).

It is this Jesus, ascended on high, who gave some to be pastors and teachers. It is He who is the Head of the church. It is from Him that the whole body is joined and knit together. It is He who causes the growth and "*the effective working by which every part does its share*" (v. 16).

Several times in this letter to the Ephesians God calls the church Christ's body (Ephesians 1:23; 3:6; 4:12; 4:16; 5:23, 30) and says that Christ is the head. This is an important thing for us to remember. This isn't my church. And this really isn't your church either. It is Christ's church. He is the head. Look to Him, the great Shepherd of the sheep. If we look to ourselves, our ministry can seem hopeless, but when we look to Christ, our head, we see that He has the power and it is He who works in us to fulfill our calling and ministry.

Dear brothers and sisters, may God preserve you in the unity of the Spirit through the gifts He has given you – the gifts of grace that He has given every one of you to carry out the work of your ministry. May you continue to speak the truth in love and grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ, who joins us all together as His body and enables us to each do our part. To Him alone be the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

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