

Ephesians 4:1-16
(Psalm 1; Matthew 7:24-27)
“A Life Worthy of Our Calling”

Introduction

In the first three chapters of this letter, the apostle Paul established the nature of our true vocation as flowing from our union with Christ. We have not merely been forgiven, nor merely justified, nor have we merely been born of the Spirit. These are a few of the key benefits of our union with Christ, so that all that is his is also ours. Thus, in the verses immediately preceding our text, Paul could pray these words for the church: “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:9).

Now, in these opening verses of chapter four, Paul makes clear what will be the theme of the second half of the letter: what life-in-Christ looks like, the transformation in behavior that should evidence our union with Christ. He writes, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,” (4:1). The basis of everything he will say is the fact that God has called us to be his in Christ and has empowered us with his Spirit so that we might comprehend and experience the reality of Christ’s life lived in and through us.

Lest such a thought cause us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought, Paul quickly adds the words, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (4:2). In other words, union with Christ should lead, not to pride, but to humility, not to contempt for others, but to love. There is no more spiritually destructive “walking oxymoron” than a person who claims the name of Christ, yet relates to others with arrogance and contempt. If we are joined to Christ, if his Spirit is within us, then his life becomes the model for our lives. When Jesus heard his disciples arguing over which of them would be greatest in the kingdom, and saw their anger at James and John for having had their mother ask Jesus that her sons be given the places of honor and authority in his kingdom, he said he said,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

It is often noted how much Paul seems to have matured spiritually between his early Galatian letter and his last letters, written after he had suffered much for the Church. In the first, he spoke sarcastically of the other apostles and bragged that he had publically rebuked Peter. In his later letters, he wrote that he was the foremost of sinners, not worthy to be numbered among the apostles, and in this letter, referred to himself as “the very least of all the saints” (3:8). So here he calls us to grow up to maturity in Christ. Note three first principles.

Body

1. **The *essence* of life in Christ is unity: “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3-6).**

Paul makes this first point theologically, based upon the nature of God and his intent for the church. Our unity comes, he writes, from the Spirit and brings us *shalom* because God is one: one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all. God’s unity is to serve as the basis of our unity: one Body, one hope, one baptism.

In the light of this, we must note and should deeply grieve the historical tragedy of our divisions over the very things that should unite us. The church has divided over our understanding of how God saves us, why Christ died for us, how the Spirit brings us God’s gifts, what baptism and the Lord’s Supper mean, how we should organize ourselves, and even over what style of music we enjoy. How the Lord must grieve over our divisions. The early creedal confessions spoke of the four attributes of the church – one, holy, catholic (meaning universal), apostolic church. The first was “one.” Yet since the fifth century, the church has not been one, and it has endured a major division every five hundred years. A mark of union with Christ is a longing for the reunion of Christ’s divided body.

2. **The *expression* of life in Christ is diversity: “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7-11).**

While we are to “filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19), no one has all of the gifts of grace. We are to be filled with the fullness of God’s life and character in Christ, but we are each members of the body of Christ. My hand is as much a part of my body as is my nose, and each is as “full” of John as is the other. Yet each has a different part to play in my body. But note, first, that each member of Christ has a gift or gifts given for the sake of the others. We do not live for ourselves, but for one another. This is one reason why Paul so often used the metaphor of the body, the other being that he learned from his experience on the Damascus road that to touch a disciple of Jesus Christ is to touch Christ himself.

Since we are all, in the language of Scripture, “charismatics,” and have been entrusted with gifts that are for building up one another, it bears asking whether we know what our gifts are, whether we are faithfully developing and using them for upbuilding and enriching one another. If you are part of this congregation, helping you do that is one of our pledges to you, and if you don’t know where to start, contact one of us on staff and we’ll meet and seek to help you along the road of discipleship.

3. The *aim* of our life in Christ is maturity: “until we all attain to.... mature manhood” (4:12-16).

While our ultimate goal is God’s glory, Paul tells us that we are to use our gifts within Christ’s body to help one another grow to maturity, for our Father desires that we grow up “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). What does that mean? In the final verses of this section, Paul contrasts one who is spiritually immature and one who is mature.

The immature person is spiritually childish (not “childlike,” which Jesus commended), marked by instability and gullibility, one who is tossed about by every new idea, “every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness” (4:14). The mature person, by contrast, is marked by two commitments: to loving communication of truth and to loving growth in Christ. “Truth in love” captures maturity in this passage, just as in his Galatian letter Paul reminded his readers that in Christ Jesus the only thing that counts is “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

Conclusion

That is a beautiful summary of the gospel: The truth of Christ understood and expressed in love, and the life of faith in Christ working itself out in love through every relationship and circumstance. As we increasingly live like that, we begin to view one another as members of the same body, an eternal family bound together in love, seeking to show one another and the world around us something of what is coming when at last Christ makes all things new. This is “the hope that belongs to [our] call” (4:4), and it serves as a star by which to navigate our way home to our Father’s house.