

## **Called and Gifted into Maturity as the Body of Christ**

11<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 08/04/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1 “I ... **urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...**”

v. 13, “**until we all arrive to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the complete man, to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ,**”

### **Introduction**

✘ In the words just before this text, Paul, who is in prison because of his bold teaching of Jesus as Savior, has been praying for his readers; for their salvation; for their faith – that they/we would be at the point in our faith to “comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth” of the “love of Christ” for us (Eph. 3:18-19).

➔ In other words, Paul is tremendously concerned about your faith friends; about my faith as well, because He says that this love that Jesus has for you and me – it entirely “surpasses” our human “knowledge”.

➔ You see, Paul knows that our human nature is that we can get too focused on how much we think we “know” up here in our head that it can get in the way of, and even sometimes block our ability to see and hear and comprehend the far deeper reality of God’s truth and love working to grow and guide us here in our hearts.

✘ And that is why Paul begins our Epistle Reading today by saying, “Therefore...I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” (v.1). It’s as if he is reading all of our minds; seeing how you think that you know more than I do about this, and how I’m concerned that you’re actually listening to what I’m saying, and how you are ready to turn to the person next to you so that you can make sure he/she knows correctly how they are to apply what I’m saying, etc.. It’s as if Paul is saying to every one of us, “Just stop it.”

➔ Stop thinking that you are already living and thinking exactly how Jesus wants and intends you to live, and pay attention here to what Jesus has already done; to what He has already given to you, and actually “walk” or live your Christian lives in a manner that truly honors Jesus in everything that you say and think and do!

### **I. The Calling – What is it?**

✘ And Paul makes no assumptions. He takes nothing for granted here. Apparently the people in the Ephesian Church were much like us today where there was a great deal of confusion about their call from God.

✘ So what is the calling to which you have been called? Well, the New Testament only speaks of two calls from God. One is the call to serve as Christ’s representative in the public ministry – as an apostle, an under-shepherd, a public proclaimer of Christ’s teaching (we’ll talk more about that in moment), and the other is the call to every soul on earth, as Jesus said in Matthew 9:13, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” This is Jesus’ call to you and to me to be Christian; to be a Christ follower.

➔ Many people misunderstand our Christian calling; thinking that it is a call to do something, when in fact Jesus actually calls you and me to be someone. It is His call for you to be a faith-follower in Christ.

➔ As I was saying earlier, walking the Christian life is not as much about what you know, but who knows you.

✘ Paul lays it out in verses 4-6, using what sounds like the beginning of one the first Christian creeds. We are called into a relationship; an understanding; a unity of ones, where “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father...”.

→ But notice; each and every one of those singular truths are for whom? Just you? Just me and my close group of friends and family that I like because they think like me and look like me? No! God and His gifts are for “all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

→ This is so crucial folks. You and I are not called into an individualistic or exclusive faith. But we have been called into a “body” – one body, yes, but it is the entire body of believers in Christ. That’s who you are, who Christ as made you to be when He called you in and through His transforming water-and-Word-miracle of baptism. You are now an integral part of the body of Christ; a member of the one Holy Christian Church; not so much a “me” or an “I” anymore, but now a “we” and “us” in Jesus.

✘ That’s how Paul talks about our new reality in verse seven, “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Understanding Paul’s “body” context here helps us properly understand what he means – that “each one of us” was given grace “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” It’s not that you received a greater or lesser measure of grace than I did.

→ No, again Paul is basically telling us to stop the comparison game where you are either trying to feel good because you think God gave you more grace than He did me or where you are feeling depressed or jealous because you think God gave me more grace than you. “Stop it,” Paul says!

→ We have all received the same measure of grace from Christ, poured out upon you in your baptism and through His Word and by His Spirit so that you, my dear Christian; you are walking around every day, overflowing with Jesus’ love; dripping with His grace on everything that you touch; splashing God’s grace out upon everyone with whom you interact each day into eternity.

## II. Christ Gave Gifts to His Body

✘ Now that we properly understand that Christ’s call to us is the calling of His love and grace, we are prepared to learn in more detail how Jesus has, and continues to shower His gifts upon us as members of His body.

→ Now I urge you here, beginning with verse 11, not to let the devil take you back into the “me” or “I” thinking that so quickly wants to compare yourself to your neighbor or to me or anyone else. But stay with Jesus; stay with His body in the “us” and “we” frame of mind, because these next passages have been incorrectly interpreted perhaps as much or more than any other passage in Scripture.

✘ Let me begin with a bit of an illustration. We’ve all been around enough to know that there are some projects, some tasks, whether you’re a mechanic, a plumber, a baker, a crafter or something else; some tasks that are only possible when you have the “right tool” for the job, right? For example, if I need to remove a snap ring deep inside my clothes dryer to replace a worn out drum wheel without potentially losing that snap ring or killing my back or making the ring unable to reuse, I need a simple but specialized snap ring plier. Or if I’m crocheting a particular sized and specifically patterned baby blanket, I need to be sure that I know the difference between a “D” and a “J” crochet hook.

✘ Well, when Jesus created and put His body of believers together and established it as His Church, He designed it and still maintains it today with His very specific instruments. Paul calls those instruments here in verse eight and following Christ’s “gifts.”

→ Remember, whose church is this? Is it your church? ... Is it my church? ... No, Jesus is the one as Paul says in verses 8-10, who after His descent here to earth to suffer, die and rise in victory over sin, death and devil, then ascended to the right hand of the Father with an entire host of souls; people whom He saved by His blood from death and hell.

→ And to those newly saved souls; to the gathering of His believers here on earth, Jesus did not just leave them/us on our own to figure out how we are supposed to live and believe as Christians. No. Verse 8 says, "He gave gifts to men." And verse 11 explains what those gifts; those specifically designed instruments for Christ's Church are, "[Jesus] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors (literally "shepherds") and teachers..."

✘ Many people misunderstand these passages to be where Paul teaches about specific "spiritual gifts" that Jesus gives to specific individuals. But that's not what Paul's teaching here. The gifts are not special characteristics or talents. The gifts are specific men in one specific office; the office of the ministry. And the recipient of those gifts is one unified body of believers; Christ's Church.

→ Notice: no names are given here, because it's not about the individual apostles, prophets, evangelists or pastors. These are instead Christ's particular instruments given to the Church to convey and pass on Christ's teachings to His people. The apostles and prophets were used by Jesus to get things established and started after His ascension. The evangelists went far and wide to spread the Gospel around the world. And now the pastors and teachers are Jesus' instruments; His gifts to His body to continue teaching, feeding and nurturing the souls within Christ's body.

→ But this is crucial – they are all teaching the same Word, proclaiming the same true God and pointing souls to the same Savior, Jesus Christ! They are united in Christ's ministry work.

### III. Christ's Unified Goal – a "Mature" Body

✘ But to what end has Jesus given these gifts to you and me as His Church? Why did Christ establish His office of the public ministry?

→ This is where we really need to take a faithful look at the original Greek language that God used here in the New Testament, because the various English translations, frankly are all over the board. Sadly, many of them seem to be tempting us to think about "me" and "I" here instead of "we" and "us".

✘ You see, that was the problem there in Ephesus, just as it is for us in our world today. As verse 14 so accurately describes our struggle with sin, we are so often tempted to act much of the time like children, because we are too easily "tossed to and fro" by the "waves and winds" of our pet peeves and our selfish agendas so that all we have to do is read something on the internet or hear someone tell us something in a confident tone and we believe it right away as an irrefutable fact.

→ This happens when we are not grounded firmly in God's Word; when we think we already know all Jesus wants us to know so we don't need to be in Bible Study with our fellow Christians. We don't need to check out that inspiring speaker's message or that friend's tempting activity or the political position of a candidate with what God's Word says and directs us to believe before we just follow the human cunning and craftiness here in our culture.

✘ In verses 12-13 Paul says, this is exactly why Jesus gave the office of the ministry to His Church. Literally the Greek says Jesus gave the clergy to His Church, "for bringing the saints to completion, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all arrive to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the complete man, to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ."

- There are three Greek terms that Paul uses in those verses as parallel terms; that is so each term explains more deeply the other terms. The first term in verse 12 is translated by many as “to equip” the saints. But “καταρτισμὸν” (katartismōn) actually means to bring something that is incomplete or imperfect to completion. Isn’t that exactly what Jesus does through His Word and Sacrament; in baptism where we are cleansed and made perfect in God’s eyes by the blood of Jesus?
  - The second term in verse 13 is “τέλειον” (teleion) which also points to completion, but more specifically as God’s plan for His people intends us to be on the Last Day at Christ’s return. It is an end times term.
  - And the third term in verse 13 is “ἡλικίας” (hēlikias). This speaks of someone growing into full maturity.
- ⌘ Together these terms, along with the other words around them describe God’s goal for us; God’s work in, through and among us by Jesus’ saving work and the Spirit’s continued growing of our faith; and God’s final intention for us as members of His body of Christian believers.
- You see, the growth of the Church is not technically about the number of souls but about the maturity of the souls. Yet, of course, the more you and I grow in our faith and in our relationship with Christ, the more confidently we will then walk according to the Christian call to which we have been called, and that will mean that we will splash and drip and overflow more of Jesus’ grace around us and upon others.
  - And you and I know that whenever Christ’s grace touches souls, it has an effect; because it comes with God’s power to make a life-altering difference within that person.
- ⌘ This is God’s intention; His goal for His body, that as Paul says in verse 16, “when each part of Christ’s body is working properly”; unified in the same confession of the one true God; made complete and mature by Christ’s gifts of Word and Sacrament as they are administered and applied through His men in the office of the ministry and living and speaking the truth in His love – that is what “makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”
- That is God’s Word; God’s design by God’s grace! May it be so here and everywhere, today and until Jesus’ glorious return. Amen.