

## THE GIFTED COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER

### Ephesians 4:1-16

**Intro.** Nothing is quite as moving as watching a team work together for victory. When I was in Cambridge I took up rowing. While rowing is physically grueling, when everyone is in synch the boat seems to leap ahead and the rowing seems effortless. (Use your own teamwork illustration). Wouldn't it be wonderful if the church functioned like a well-conditioned team so that our ministry seemed effortless and yet the church was constantly leaping ahead in terms of the great commission?

In the Ephesian letter Paul focuses on the incredible potential of the church to express God's fullness in the world. In Eph. 1:19-23 Paul declares that God has made available to the church power comparable to that which was exercised in raising Jesus from the dead. Do we plan and act like we have resurrection power? Further, he declares that God placed everything under the feet of Christ for the church so that it might express God's fullness in the world. In Eph. 3:10 Paul tells us it was God's eternal plan to reveal His manifold wisdom through the church. When God holds our church up before the community does the world see the manifold wisdom of God?

Perhaps you are wondering how God plans to accomplish such a miracle through our church. The answer is that He gives it gifted members, who when they work together, will cause the body to grow up into every aspect into Christ Jesus. What potential!

#### **1. Unity—the Foundation for Kingdom Service (1-6)**

It is not insignificant that Paul begins with an "urgent" plea for believers to live worthy of the calling. God gave His only begotten Son to redeem us and to call us into community and therefore it is incumbent on us to live worthy of that call.

Verses 2 and 3 are self-explanatory. These virtues or characteristics remind us of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is calling for behavior that manifests the character of Christ produced in us by the Holy Spirit. This plea for the worthy walk reminds us that living in community is difficult. It is challenging! But we have supernatural empowering to make it possible. Do the relationships in our church provide any evidence that the Spirit indwells us giving us unity?

Unity is challenging because we come from diverse backgrounds and have different desires and tastes. But we are bound together by a great sevenfold cord of unity. The first triad—one body, one Spirit, one hope of your calling—speaks our calling and incorporation into the body of Christ by virtue of our redemption. The second triad—one Lord, one faith, one baptism—recalls the moment one confessed Christ as Lord and savior. Paul then concludes this section with a reference to the triune God, whose oneness is the basis for our unity. Do you remember the great High Priestly prayer of Jesus? Look at John 17:20-21. It is our unity which will convince the world that the Father sent the Son. Wow! Too much is at stake for us to allow our petty differences to divide us.

## **2. The Exalted King Gifts His Church (7-11)**

The emphasis on Christ as the giver of the gifts is unique to this letter. Paul is demonstrating that the all-sufficient Christ has, by virtue of His resurrection and ascension, made His church sufficient for any and every task.

You might wonder how He empowers His church. The answer is me and you. He gives gifts to men and women and then gives these people to the church. This single truth should shake us from the lethargy of playing church as if it is a spectator sport. We are saved to serve the King and He has gifted us for the task.

## **3. Gifted Leaders to Equip Gifted Members (11-12)**

The New Testament church did not know of artificial distinctions should as “clergy” and “laity.” Some men were gifted with leadership abilities—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers. Their role is to equip the saints, also gifted, for service to the King through His bride the church.

Paul’s emphasis on leadership and declaration gifts in this context is related to the unique historical situation where a “new-age-like” heresy was spreading and threatening the church. Nonetheless, he makes clear (v. 7) that each of us has received grace for ministry.

Every member is bound to Christ and to fellow-members by our giftedness. We are a team and we need each other if the church is to fulfill its kingdom purpose. Notice the conclusion in verse 16. The body builds itself in love, “as each part does its work.”

## **4. The Results of Teamwork (12-16)**

What would it look like if we all joined hands, employing our gifts at the King’s direction?

The bottom line is that the body will be built up (12). In other words, God will use us to advance His kingdom. But this growth is not simply a numerical growth, it is a multi-faceted growth. Listen to these phrases.

- 1) Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son.
- 2) Maturity—measured by the fullness of Christ (13)
- 3) Doctrinal stability (14)
- 4) Speaking the truth in love, we will grow up into our Head (15)

Don’t miss this concluding description of growth (16). The growth is empowered by the Head, Christ. But the power is applied in our church and through our church through “every supporting ligament.” We are the joints and ligaments through which God manifests His supernatural power on earth. That is why that “each part does its work.”

## **Invitation**

