

## **“EQUIPPING THE SAINTS”**

**Ephesians 4:1-16**

**August 5, 2018**

**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**

### **Ephesians 4:1-16**

**4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 4:3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

**4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

**4:7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. 4:8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." 4:9 (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? 4:10 He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)**

**4:11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 4:12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 4:13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

**4:14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 4:16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

**This portion of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is filled with practical advice for the church.**

**Paul is urging the people to live up to their calling as Christians.**

**Being a Christian is more than just not being something else.**

**If you ask people: "Are you a Christian?"**

**Most likely they will say "Yes"**

**only because they aren't something else:**

**Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, whatever.**

**Those folks are "cultural Christians."**

**Being a Christian means far more than not being a non-Christian.**

**It is more than simply thinking that Jesus was a great teacher and trying to follow those teachings.**

**Some people will say, "Well, I don't drink, don't smoke, don't dance and I go to church, therefore I am a Christian.**

**Being a Christian is far more than what you do or don't do.**

**Sitting in church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than sitting in a garage makes you a car.**

**Being a Christian means that you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; that everything you do is in response to what Jesus has done for you.**

**In other words,  
your relationship with Christ  
causes you to put into practice what you believe.**

**Paul insists there must be a balance  
between what the people say they believe  
and the way that plays out in their lives.**

**As Presbyterians,  
we believe God has called us to the grace we have received.**

**Paul is saying  
we need to be about the business of living out that calling.**

**FOUR GRACES OF OUR CALLING:**

**Paul says there are four indications of our calling as Christians.  
They are: humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance.**

**These are all manifested in the way we treat each other.  
We are humble; not haughty.**

**William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury said:**

**"Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or the other at all."**

**George Washington Carver,**

**the scientist who developed hundreds of useful products  
from the peanut once said:**

**"When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That knowledge is reserved for me alone.' So, I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well, George, that's more nearly your size.' And He told me."**

**We are given the grace –  
and are expected to be gentle; not harsh.**

**A gentle spirit draws people closer  
a harsh attitude pushes them away.**

**We are given the grace of patience  
and we are expected to be patient; not intolerant.**

**Anyone who has ever taught a craft –  
- like fly tying, art, knitting, or watchmaking –  
knows how much more is accomplished through patience  
than through harshness.**

**Forbearance means we exercise patient self-control;  
restraint and tolerance towards others.**

**Just as God has promised to refrain from enforcing His laws  
by sending us straight to Hell,  
so, we – as Christians – are to refrain  
from exacting revenge upon those who betray us.**

**Paul says that when these graces are lacking,  
Christian unity suffers  
and the Church becomes derailed in its journey  
to be the Church God calls it to be.**

**By focusing on Christ and pursuing peace,  
these four graces can be practiced.**

**However,  
we cannot achieve these graces through our own efforts.  
It is only by the grace of God – and God's help -  
that we can live up to the graces we are given.**

**THEOLOGY OF PAUL'S URGING:**

**Paul then gives us the theology to back up his exhortation:**

**4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 4:6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

**When God looks at us,  
God doesn't see races, political persuasions or anything else.  
God doesn't see Methodists and Baptists  
or Catholics and Presbyterians.**

**God sees the people He created and loves beyond measure.  
People who have been called into covenant  
through the sacrificial death of Jesus.**

**Oh, we may have created some minor differences  
in the way we *practice* our Christianity –**

- the method of baptism**
- the way our churches are organized and governed**
- some of our rituals and celebrations**

**But when we focus on the heart of the matter:  
that Jesus is the Christ, Son of God, and Savior,  
the differences are no longer important.**

**As Christians, we are *unified* through Christ.  
We are all gather into the Body of Christ.**

**Paul then turns to the leadership  
both in and beyond the local church:  
apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.**

**Apostles, prophets and evangelists mostly work *outside* the church.  
Pastors and teachers concentrate  
on the people *within* the church.**

**And Paul says that the primary responsibility of all these leaders, is to equip God's people for service.**

**“for building up the body of Christ,4:13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

**It is not an exhortation for everyone to have a job in the church!**

**Although it is God's will  
that we use the gifts we have been given  
to build God's kingdom,  
together, in peaceful unity.**

### **THE GOAL:**

**The goal of leadership in a Church is plainly stated in vs. 14:**

**“We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.”**

**This is echoed in 1 Peter 3:15 –**

**“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect . . .”**

**It is the responsibility of the leadership of churches to educate and equip people to share –**

**- and defend – their faith in the public arena.**

**One of the last commandments Jesus gave was Matthew 28:19-20 –**

**“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and *teach* them to obey all that I have commanded you.**

**If we are to be *effective* witnesses for Jesus Christ,**

**we must be firmly grounded in the *reason*  
we believe what we believe.**

**Not only must we have “head” knowledge,  
we must be *transformed* by that knowledge.**

**We must have it firmly planted in our hearts –  
- and *understand* what we believe -  
so that our actions match our spoken beliefs.  
So that we exhibit the graces mentioned earlier.**

**God expects us – calls us – to share our faith with others  
whenever the opportunity arises.**

**Now a word or two about sharing your faith.**

**The operative word is *sharing*.**

**I have a buddy that I fish with often.  
I usually pack a light lunch for us to *share*.**

**When I share with him,  
I don't throw him to the ground,  
pry his mouth open  
and force the food down his throat.**

**Instead, I have gotten to know him well enough  
that I know to pack a lot of extra pickles  
and salt for the hard-cooked eggs.**

**Sharing our faith with others is very much like that.  
We don't start out by  
beating others over the head with the Bible!**

**Memorizing a lot of scripture**

then bombarding them with verse after verse  
is simply *not* going to get the job done!

Remember the four graces from earlier in this sermon?

We are humble; not haughty.

We are gentle; not harsh.

We are patient; not intolerant.

And we exercise patient self-control;  
restraint and tolerance towards others.

*That's* how we are to share our faith.

And it takes instruction and practice to become skilled at it.

That is why it is so important  
for the leadership of the church  
to prepare the people to *share* their faith.

In order to effectively share our faith,  
we must be *prepared!*

Otherwise, we are likely to seem either too stringent in our beliefs  
or too weak to effectively respond to questions about our faith.

I used to have a t-shirt that had two fingers pointing –  
one pointing up – the other pointing down.

The shirt had the words:

“Either you’re going up or you’re going down.  
Deal with it.”

My wife thought that was a little aggressive.

**ASSESSMENT OF WHERE WE ARE:**

OK. Let’s look at some practical application.

**Nationwide, 42% of people joining churches  
are looking for a place to make a difference.  
They yearn to volunteer.**

**For people our age,  
that percentage is even higher.**

**With our careers behind us,  
and our children successfully raised,  
we are not content to “sit and soak.”  
we want to be involved in something worthwhile.**

**We have a lifetime of wisdom,  
we have skills honed by long careers,  
we have time and talent to share,  
and we want to make a difference.**

**And we are doing very, very well at serving others.**

**God calls us to be something more than a volunteer organization.  
We have enough of those:  
Peace Corps, Vista, pet shelters, Job Corps,  
Red Cross, food banks, women’s shelters . . .**

**All those activities are needed and worthy,  
and they are great opportunities to speak a word for Christ.**

**However, without *prepared* Christians  
working in these organizations,  
we could be missing the opportunities  
to help people develop spiritually.**

**Christians know that their involvement in the community  
- and in the world –  
is vital to the work of Christ.**

**Christians know that their God given gifts  
are needed for Christ's Kingdom.**

**They know they may face criticism from friends and family  
for “wasting” their time.**

**People who come to *this* church expect – EXPECT –  
to be part of something that makes a difference  
and they expect to be *prepared* – spiritually prepared –  
to do that work.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**The bottom line is this:**

**“The mature disciple realizes  
that he/she is an imperfect person  
working with other imperfect Christians  
to serve a perfect Christ.”**

**My prayer for this Church  
is that we will work together  
to become sensitive and knowledgeable witnesses  
for the Good News we have in Christ.**

**Not only does that take good leaders . . .  
. . . it also takes willing followers.**

**PRAYER:**

**Gentle God, we have traveled through many waters to reach  
this place, but we share one baptism; we arrive from different  
backgrounds and traditions, yet we share one faith; we are, each of  
us, unique and precious to You, O God, and are members of one  
Body. We have different dreams and doubts, yet our hearts beat  
with one hope; we are graced with different gifts, so we may offer**

**them in service to one Lord.**

**God of All Hope, Holy in One, equip us for the work of  
ministry, that we might be a mighty tool in Your hands. Amen.**