

"The Mystery of Christ, Part Three"

Ephesians 4:11-15

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And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: (Eph 4:11-15)

As I said last week: The work of the Spirit requires the strength of the Spirit. Before Paul commands the church to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, he bows his knees:

“unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:14-19)

The work of the Holy Spirit can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Spirit is the gift of the Spirit and we are called to endeavor to keep the unity; not to make the unity. The word “keep” has the idea of guarding, of watching. “Endeavor” is a very strong word and doesn’t mean “try” It means to “at all cost” “do not leave any effort undone” “exert

yourselves to the utmost.” It is only when Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, that we will be rooted and grounded in love. THEN, we will be able to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, and length, and depth, and height...and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.”

Calvin says that the “breadth and length and height and depth refer to the love of Christ and that all knowledge is to be occupied with that: Any knowledge that is not related to the love of Christ is useless and foolish, for all things are contained in the love of Christ.

How can you say you love God when you despise your neighbor, or despise Christ’s his ministers and His church, or despise his elders, or set aside the lawful and proper rule of the church. If you do not know the love of Christ you have nothing to measure anything by, for that is the only measure that is given to us. You can measure by yourself, but that will not stand in the day of judgment.

We must be reminded of the words of the Catechism, which is true Christian doctrine.

Q65: Since, then, we are made partakers of Christ and all his benefits by faith only, where does this faith come from?

A65: The Holy Ghost works faith in our hearts [1] by the preaching of the Holy Gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy sacraments.[2]

In our text, the Apostle passes to the central thing: how do we come to this faith, how do we grow up in this faith, how do we mature in the faith? There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and the Lord has made ample provisions for us with regard to this faith. This is the subject of what is before us. Let us look at the words:

“11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to

and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:” (Eph 4:11-15)

Let us look at the words before us:

As we saw last week, the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven as the Mediator, receiving from His father the kingdom over all things, including gifts for men, even for those who had been rebellion against Him, these gifts, which are the work of the Holy Spirit, He has imparted to men.. What is before us are not the offices of the church, but the inward graces, gifts of the Holy Spirit, that equip a man to do the work of the offices. Not all the offices are mentioned here.

I. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teacher.

A. No one has received all these gifts. Only Jesus had the Holy Spirit without measure.

B. The gifts are for the good of the church, not for self-glory or self-esteem, or personal advantage.

C. The gifts are gifts, not the reward of merit.

D. There were extraordinary gifts that ceased when their purpose was finished: apostles and prophets.

E. There were gifts extraordinary/common: evangelists

F. There are ordinary gifts: pastor/teachers

1. Pastor deals with oversight and discipline

2. Teacher deals with instruction.

3. There are pastor/teachers; there are pastors there are teachers. As far as offices go.

a) Elders have a pastor function

b) Some are teachers without oversight responsibilities.

c) Some are both teachers and overseers/ as ministers in the RCUS and most modern reformed churches.

II. The end and goal of these gifts is for the good of the church in the following considerations:

A. Perfecting of the saints: bringing them to maturity. So they can function as grownups. The verb form of this word is used in Heb. 11:3, “The worlds were framed by the word of God.” It means to repair something, or make up what is lacking, or fit the saints to do what they are meant to do in the body of Christ, as is set forth in the next phrase:

B. Work of the ministry: The word is deacon, which in a general sense means service to one another. Those in office not only serve the church, but they are called to teach each member to serve.

1. It is important to distinguish between service and the office of deacon. The office of deacon is for males only and their function is set forth in the Bible and in the constitutions of the church. The general duty of Christians to serve one another does not require an office or a title.

2. A parallel is with the word “minister” We are called to minister to one another, and all are required to have a heart for the needs of each other; but it is especially important for the church not to elevate the function into a title with authority that is not granted in the Scriptures. Women certainly are to minister to the needs of a church, but it would be wrong to call her a Minister of Worship or even Minister of Women’s Ministries and list her among the officers of the church.

C. Edifying of the Body of Christ.. The meaning is the building up and the increase and growth of the body. This takes place when each person finds his function and service in the body, is not slack concerning the performance of his duty under Christ.

You have heard me quote this a bunch of times: the 55th question of the catechism:

Q55: What do you understand by the "communion of saints"?

A55: First, that believers, one and all, as members of the Lord Jesus Christ, are partakers with Him in all His treasures and gifts;[1] second, that each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and welfare of other members.[2]

These ideas are not something that we give a half-hearted attention to: the apostle is calling us to strong action—to awake, to stir ourselves, to be grownups, not childish. We are not in high school playing high school games, but are to function as adult men and women for the glory of God. These things require our utmost attention, or we will be overwhelmed by the wiles of the devil, for he is much smarter than we are, and hides his snares to catch the unwary.

III. These three phrase converge two results, if it be of Christ.

A. The unity of the faith. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

B. In the knowledge of the Son of God. This is a deep knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge of doctrine and dogma. The knowledge of God must be spiritual and experiential. The bare knowledge of biology will not mean that a man is a good husband, or that a woman is a good wife. It takes a different kind of knowledge than that found in books, a personal and living knowledge. As verse 17 of chapter one says:

“15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the

riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,” (Eph 1:15-18)

What is the measure by which we are to measure ourselves? It is Christ, and Christ alone.

C. The measure is the stature of the fullness of Christ. Vs. 14. To repeat Paul’s prayer beginning in 3:14

“14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph 3:14-19)

Christ alone is the breadth, the length, the depth, and height. This love passes knowledge. We have faith and hope and charity, but the greatest of these is charity.

D. That which is to be avoided: to be like children, tossed like dice to and fro. In order to be mature, productive, godly men and women, productive in the Kingdom of God and in the Church of Jesus Christ.

A few days old baby is cute, and four year old baby is a nuisance, a 18 year old baby is obnoxious, a 40 year old baby is a danger to society.

I have made the application as I have gone along. May God bless you.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.