

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 17

Grace Was Given
September 22nd, 2013
Ephesians 4:7-16
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Explain the new format – using the anticipated questions to organize Paul’s argument.

Relating to Ephesians 4:1-6:

¹I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6. ESV)

Walk worthy of the Gospel, cultivate these virtues so that you can be a TRUTH and LOVE, ORTHODOX and PEACEFUL church. Toward that end we have grace (v.7)

Where Does Our Help Come From?

⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸Therefore it says,
“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

The Apostle Paul uses here a quotation from Psalm 68:18 to make a point about the grace that we receive from the ascended Christ. Psalm 68 was a Psalm that was read by the Jews at Pentecost where they celebrated the giving of the Law. Moses went up the mountain and received the law

from God and then came down bringing the people that great blessing. Paul is using that imagery but applying it freshly to Jesus. He is saying because Jesus went up and came down and poured out – we have an even greater gift than the law that Moses brought - we have Divine Grace. Jesus is the better Mediator and he brings us better gifts. That’s the point being made by the ascending and descending language. Look now at verse 8 in the NKJV which I think brings this next point out a little better:

*“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”* (Ephesians 4:8. NKJV)¹

Paul is saying that because Jesus came down and went up and poured out – captivity itself has been taken captive and he gave gifts to men. Let me bring this down to street level. Here is what I want you to see: The victory of Jesus Christ – his life, obedience, death, resurrection, ascension and pouring out of the Holy Spirit provides for you the Christian – FREEDOM and HELP. Let that hit you.

This is why you can’t say as so many of you have as you think about coming to faith in Christ: “first let me quit smoking pot or first let me move out of my boyfriend’s apartment or first let me get my finances in order and then I’ll be ready to come to Jesus.” My friend listen to me: You can’t do any of those things in your own strength! None of us can! We need Jesus to set us free and to take our addictions captive and to defeat our brokenness and stupidity and to give us help to live a new life. If you need release today and if you need help – come to Jesus. Come. Whosoever will may come! God in his mercy grant that you may come. Come and receive from him freedom and help.

What Is Our Help?

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

Leaders are a gift. We expect something else here don’t we? We expect gifts – preferably the cool ones like tongues or healing or dreams or visions or miraculous powers and instead we get people – even worse we get LEADER PEOPLE. This is a tough one for us to hear because we

¹ The ESV tries to clean this up by harmonizing it with the version of Psalm 68:18 you have in your English Old Testament but Paul seems to have used an obscure liturgical version of Psalm 68 that better fit the point he was trying to make and the NKJV just leaves it.

live in a culture where leadership is vilified and despised – ‘stick it to the man’ is the cry of our culture. But the Bible says: leaders are a gift. Now at the end of this passage he talks about how every piece is connected, this is a totally corporate experience and in 1 Corinthians 12 he reminds us that every piece is equally important but here Paul is just saying that leaders are a gift and we need to receive that. This isn’t everything Paul says about gifts but its not nothing. Here Paul says that leaders are a gift. Specifically he says that Jesus gave us apostles, prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers. Let’s talk about that list for a moment.

I don’t have time to go into all the details but many scholars think that what we have here are two classes of leaders. We have the first generation leaders who launched the church and we have the regular officers of the church that provide leadership in perpetuity until the Lord comes back and I think that is more or less correct. I think it is probably right to see Apostles and Prophets as one class of New Testament leader; they are the booster rockets that get this thing going and then are cast off in favour of more efficient propulsion. Wayne Grudem argues fairly convincingly that most of the time in the NT Apostles and Prophets are the same people. You can think of prophets as the writing Apostles perhaps. There are other non-apostolic prophets in the New Testament, I’m not saying that there aren’t, I’m saying when you see those words together: “Apostles and Prophets” the Bible is talking about one class of people. Other people are called “small-a” apostles and other people are called “small-p” prophets but these are the APOSTLE/PROPHETS and they lay the foundation of the church through their teaching and writing. We saw that earlier in this letter; in Ephesians 2 Paul said that the church was:

²⁰built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets**, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20. ESV)

So I think that is the first type of gift Jesus gave, we got Spirit empowered, authoritative APOSTLE/PROPHETS and what a gift that has been to us! There is so much we wouldn’t know if we only had the red letter parts of our Bible. There is a ridiculous movement out there called “Red Letter Christianity” where young people are encouraged to live only by the Red Letter parts of their Bibles. Don’t get bogged down in the Old Testament and don’t listen to Paul or James, just read the Red Letter parts and you’ll be fine. But there is so much Jesus didn’t say. People are fond of pointing out that Jesus never spoke about homosexuality – only Moses and Paul and so maybe it doesn’t really matter. But Jesus never spoke about rape or incest either – do those

things not matter? I am so thankful that the ENTIRE BIBLE is breathed of God and useful. It is indeed, as Jesus said in those little Red Letters: “much to our advantage”.

Secondly he gave the evangelists and pastors and teachers. Now grammatically it is pretty clear that these are two people not three. The “pastors and teachers” people share an article meaning that these are two words to describe one office. For the on-going leadership of the church Jesus gave evangelists – that word literally means “Gospel preachers” and he gave pastor/teachers or as the ESV translates “Shepherds”. Its important that we don’t import our modern day understanding of “evangelist” into this word – Billy Graham is a 20th century phenomenon and prior to that we didn’t tend to think of Evangelists as people who worked outside of the local church – that’s new and I think bad, so don’t impose that on the text. Our word “gospel” comes from this Greek word which literally means “gospeller” or “preacher of the Gospe^l”. You’d be better to read this as “preachers and shepherds who teach” – those are the two on-going gifts. This is the type of leadership we have in our church – we have a board of elders some of whom are full time paid preachers and some whom are elected shepherds who according to 1 Timothy 3 need to be apt to teach – not necessarily to preach but apt to teach. They need to know the truth, weigh the truth and be able to pass on the truth. That kind of leader, the Bible says is a gift, pray for the grace to receive it and to experience it as such.

What Do Leaders Do?

¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Leaders help the church grow in 3 ways:

- i. Capacity
- ii. Content
- iii. Character

All of this is done by good teaching – notice that the gifts given are the teaching offices of the church. By good teaching leaders the church will grow – that’s what Paul is saying. Let me explain those three categories that we see in the text.

i. Capacity: Equipping people for ministry.

The word used for ministry is actually the Greek word *diakonias* from which we get our word “deacon” or “deaconate”. Paul is saying that gifted and faithful leaders in feeding their flock the full Gospel Word should facilitate a church where every member engages the diaconal ministry. Listen to that very carefully. Far too often we speak as though the end of the discipleship process is every member a leader – that is not what the text says. In a church of 600 people we don’t need 600 leaders – that would be a nightmare! We need 12 leaders or maybe 15 at the most; what we really need are 580 deacons. Don’t spend your whole Christian life wondering why you haven’t been asked to be an elder. Women, allow me to say, don’t spend your whole life resenting that you cannot be an elder. The goal of the Christian life is to be a deacon not an elder. Christianity is lived out, not in dusty board meetings that go to 11:30 at night! The highest expression of our faith is not the immense privilege of pouring over our bylaws with pen and highlighter until your head is splitting with a massive migraine. That is the dirty work that is done by a called few so that the rest of the body can do what really matters for the glory of God in this city. Ministry is cutting potatoes so that seniors can live with dignity in their homes. Ministry is changing diapers in the nursery so that a young mom can hear the Gospel uninterrupted. Ministry is sitting in the back of a smelly bus full of Jr. High kids on their way to Killbear so that they can learn about Jesus, get saved and bond with a role model. Ministry is wearing one of those ridiculous blue shirts so that you can teach our sons and our daughters about the unspeakable beauty of the Christ of the Bible. That’s ministry. You’re not missing anything in fact, after last Monday night we all want to trade places with you!

ii. Content

The way Paul pairs “unity in the faith” with the “knowledge of Christ” in verse 13 is very interesting. Again, we tend to think that if we increase theological precision we are going to

decrease opportunities for fellowship – Paul operates on exactly the opposite assumption – just notice that. Now, when Paul is talking here about mature faith he is not talking about HOW HARD WE BELIEVE he is talking about HOW MUCH WE BELIEVE. That isn't my opinion; that is the clear indication of the text. New Testament scholar Peter O'Brian says that given the context and the grammar the mature faith: “is best understood here in terms of its **objective content** rather than the readers' activity of believing. The point being made then, is that God's people are moving towards the goal of **appropriating all that is included** in the one faith.”² As the centuries roll on, as faithful preachers and shepherds do their thing we should get deeper and deeper into the Word and we should learn more and more of the content of our faith. Mature faith therefore is about knowing MORE not just believing it harder. Content accumulation is not the end of faith but it cannot be separated from faith.

iii. Character

Verse 13 goes on to say that preachers and shepherds will help the church grow until we all attain unity in “mature manhood” to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is a mouthful but all it means is that the job of leaders in the church is not over until your local church reflects the entire CHARACTER of her Lord and Saviour. This is no different than what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 which we looked at last week:

¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into **the same image** from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18. NRSV)

Christian leaders are a gift in the church given by the Risen and Ascended and Seated Jesus to help the church grow in her capacity, her content and her character and this is going to go on until we attain the MEASURE OF THE MAN – that's what the Bible says, and that and only that must be the measure of our leadership and the measure of our church.

What Is The Result Of Good Leadership In The Church?

² Peter O'Brian, Ephesians; p. 306.

This leadership is exercised toward an immediate end according to Paul and we see that in verses 14-15a:

¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way

As good leaders do their thing in the church you ought to see to results; you ought to see:

- i. Stability
- ii. Growth

Paul uses the metaphor of a ship upon the seas to illustrate the sort of stability he's talking about. He says that if you have good leaders in your church who do what they are supposed to then you will develop WEIGHT below the waterline that will allow you to withstand the winds and waves of theological novelty. New ideas are going to blow through the church as the fresh winds of stupid from time to time and you can't be chasing that stuff down! It may look like the path to growth but it never lasts! A few years ago the novel teachings of Rob Bell were welcomed by many in the church as the fresh and wholesome winds of spring. Our denomination actually sent a van full of young pastors down to Michigan to find out what was going on. The church there grew from nothing to 10,000 people almost overnight, it was a phenomenon and everyone wanted a piece of it. NUMA videos were everywhere and everyone was fascinated with the new teaching and thenboom. It all went bust because there is nothing new under the sun and novelty is not a good thing when it comes to the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The next metaphor he uses is from street dice. The word "cunning" there is the Greek word *kubeia* from which we get our word "cube" or "dice". He is talking about hustlers and slight of hand. Don't be distracted by the circus! Don't believe the hype! If the lobby of the church is decorated with discarded crutches and the preacher at the front is wearing a white suit covered in rhinestones you are in the wrong place! Get out of there! A church that has been blessed with good leaders will not fall prey to that nonsense, he says.

Lastly there the words translated as “deceitful schemes” literally mean “erroneous methods”. The Greek word *methodeian* supplies us with our English word “method” and *planeis* means error or fraudulent. The job of good leaders in the church is to help people avoid being sucked in by the newest methodological fads that promise quick growth but never actually deliver. Churches without good leaders are always lurching from one program to the next, from this thing that the megachurch does to that thing that the megachurch does. Those things may promise quick growth but when the smoke machine starts getting a little old and the coffee machine in the lobby loses its novelty – is there anything there that is REAL, that is AUTHORITATIVE and that is SAVING? Don’t go in for that stuff. Good leaders will seek to keep their church out of those ditches and on the real path to growth and increase. That leads us to the fourth thing that I think is worth reflecting on in this passage. Paul says we need to stay away from theological novelty, we need to get out of the circus business, and we need to have nothing to do with pragmatism and slick marketing campaigns because the church will grow when it sticks to the time tested game plan: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

This isn’t rocket science. There is a path to growth and Paul tells us what it is. It is simply:

speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15. ESV)

Literally the text says: “truthing in love” – the word speaking has to be supplied in English. The Greek just has the word for truth in participle form – “truthing” in love. How are we going to grow? By truthing in love. That’s the game plan church and its not super-sexy or innovative I know that, and we’ll probably never be asked to write a book about it but the success of this plan is guaranteed by the Word and promise of God so I say we stick with it from generation to generation so help us God.

What Is The Source?

Paul ends where he began – with Christ as source. He say’s we are going to grow:

into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:7-16. ESV)

Maybe you think that is unnecessarily repetitive, Paul told us off the top where all these graces come from – they come from the seated Christ. But then he talked about leaders and the great danger with this great gift is that far too often leaders can replace Christ as the source and fount of blessings in the church. So, here at the end, as at the beginning, Christ is the source of our grace and our growth.

There is a caution here for leaders here, isn't there? Don't allow your leadership to BE THE SOURCE – We are the waiters at HIS TABLE – we are not the food! Don't allow people to feed on you, leaders. Don't ever allow my voice to become "The Voice". You will make me the enemy of God and you will make yourself a digger of dry wells. Don't do it. See past the waiter to the bounty of the host.

Lastly:

What Is The End Or The Purpose Of It All?

I suspect you know the answer, Paul told us off the top:

that he might fill all things. (Ephesians 4:10. ESV)

The ultimate end of all of this grace and all of this growth is that the glory of God in Christ would fill the earth as waters fill the sea. Now there is a MASSIVE implication in that truth that we find harder to see than did our grandparents. Over the last 60 years we have been conditioned to believe in the smallness, the weakness and the hopelessness of the local church. We've lived through a decline in influence since the 50's in North America and so we are just not prepared to see that. We're looking for a story about the church's increasing smallness and weakness and that's not what we see here. Here we see the GLORY OF CHRIST filling the earth as the church grows and becomes more mature in her theology and in her fellowship until the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth as waters fill the sea.

Here is the implication I want you to see in simple terms: A good church glorifies God.

A well led, doctrinally sound, peaceful, loving, stable church – GROWING as they speak the truth in love – GLORIFIES GOD and spreads his glory through all the earth.

That's what this text is saying; that's where this is going and it is glorious.

Conclusion:

This is not a new end and this is not a new plan for getting there. Look at Isaiah 2

² It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
³ and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.” (Isaiah 2:2-3. ESV)

In the latter days the House of the Lord is going to be lifted up and all the nations shall flow to it – why Isaiah? To what end? He tells us in chapter 11:

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9. ESV)

Listen to me church I know you've been sold a story about how the world is going to get darker and darker and the church is going to get smaller and smaller until POOF!; we all get raptured out of our pyjamas – but where is that story – where is that narrative of failure and perpetual smallness in the Bible? Jesus never said that, he said the world would get darker but he said the church would grow larger. He talked about Mustard Seeds and he said that the wheat and the tares would GROW TOGETHER UNTIL THE END and then at the harvest they would be separated with the chaff being cast into the fire. According to Jesus – the world gets darker and the church shines brighter until the end! Its time to start believing that again. We have been given good gifts and we will grow and mature and serve – until the glory of God FILLS THIS CITY and rolls down into every crack and crevice in this country and indeed outward unto to all the earth. This is the Sovereign Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.