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Church Relationships, Part 7

Ephesians 4:11-16 is an important to our understanding of ministry in the church. These 6 verses contain a skeletal blue-print for how a church ought to function, we call this study Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. The passage gives us the purpose and place of an elder in the body of Christ. It describes the ministry relationship that ought to exist between church leaders and the congregation. It identifies what we ought to long for when it comes to church growth. Paul in describing the elements of church growth writes:

Ephesians 4:13, "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

This is how we measure growth in a local body! It is NOT bodies, bucks, and buildings, BUT growth when it comes to, "...the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God..." This is what makes the body of Christ, "...a mature man..." Ephesians further describes how this process of maturation is secured.

Ephesians 4:16b, "...the proper working of each individual part [that is you and me, which then...], causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

From this you must see that a healthy church is a church where each and every one of us fulfills the God-given calling that has been placed on our lives! And it is toward this end that Paul gave us 1 Thessalonians 5. In this text, Paul discusses biblical church relationships. God's people must be consumed with edifying one another.

1 Thessalonians 5:15b, "see that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men."

Paul's choice of words is quite revealing. The first word is seek after — διώκετε (*diokete*). Just as Eskimos have at least fifty different words for snow,¹ so the Bible has quite a few different words to denote the idea of "seeking," "desiring," or "following after." For example:

1. ζητέω (*zēteō*)
2. ἀναζητέω (*anazēteō*)
3. ἐκζητέω (*ekzēteō*)
4. ἐπιζητέω (*epizēteō*)
5. ὀρέγω (*oregō*)
6. ἀκολουθέω (*akoloutheō*)
7. ἐξακολουθέω (*exakoloutheō*)
8. ἐπακολουθέω (*epakoloutheō*)
9. κατακολουθέω (*katakoloutheō*)
10. παρακολουθέω (*parakoloutheō*)
11. συνακολουθέω (*sunakoloutheō*)
12. γίνομαι (*ginomai*)
13. ἔπειμι (*epeimi*)
14. ζηλόω (*zēloō*)
15. παραζηλόω (*parazēloō*)

Now, Paul could have chosen to use any one of these words in our text, but he didn't. Instead he chose the word διώκω (*diōkō*) which has a very specific nuance in the Greek. It means to "push, drive, or set in motion." Here it is used in the present tense which therefore speaks of an ongoing, never-ceasing activity. It is a strong word and so the primary word in the Bible for "persecute." It describes *an untiring, dogged pursuit of someone or something*. And so it is used in these verses:

1 Timothy 6:11, “But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue [untiringly pursue] righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.”

This is a command to make these virtues our goal and so to strive after them with all our heart! Speaking of the last days and the return of Christ, Jesus said this:

Luke 17:23, “And they will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after *them*.”

If Christ took up residence in a certain part of the world (which He won’t- but if He did), how much effort would you expend in order to see Him, to talk to Him, to be with Him? I think you would be like Asahel who doggedly pursued Abner (2 Samuel 2:18-23); no matter what Abner said or how fast he ran, Asahel could not be shaken! That is the idea behind this word. It is the primary term used in Scripture to denote severe persecution.

Galatians 1:13, “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure...”

That is our word. Paul’s passion to squash the church drove him all over Palestine in his desire to destroy Christians (cf. Acts 26:11)!

That is the idea behind this word. Again, it is an intense word, apply used to describe the Olympian in Paul’s day. As the Olympic athlete:

- Organized his life around one “pursuit”- the attaining of a perishable wreath.
- Spent years denying himself, ordering every moment to the maximum of training efficiency.
- Counted no sacrifice too great or small if it enabled him to attain a better performance.

So also must be the believer’s passion when it comes to fulfilling their call in the lives of those around them. That is Paul’s exhortation. In fact to add emphasis, notice that Paul added the word “always.”

1 Thessalonians 5:15, “but always seek after that which is good.”

If it wasn’t enough to use διώκω (*diōkō*) in the present tense, Paul added “always” to make the calling and so the exhortation that much more pressing!

When it comes to our obligation to the body of Christ we are not to grow weary, lose our passion, or get side-tracked! We must diligently labor ever and always to keep the main thing when it comes to the body of Christ the main thing!

Now, what is that main thing? What is it that we are *always* to doggedly pursue when it comes to our relationship with one another?

1 Thessalonians 5:26, “but always seek after that which is good for one another.”

There are primarily two words in the Bible for “good”: καλός (*kalos*) and ἀγαθός (*agathos*). καλός (*kalos*) refers to that which is *intrinsically good*; good by its very nature. ἀγαθός (*agathos*) refers to that which, being good in its essence (like καλός [*kalos*]), is *beneficial in its effect*. And so, for example, Paul uses both terms in Romans.

Romans 7:18, “For I know that nothing good [ἀγαθός (*agathos*) speaking primarily of the fruit of his life- the results] dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good [καλός (*kalos*) and so that which is intrinsically good before God] is not.”

Do you see the distinction? ἀγαθός (*agathos*) refers to beneficial results and καλός (*kalos*) refers to the essential nature of something. In the Parable of the Sower, Christ speaks of an “honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). “Honest” being καλός (*kalos*) and so that which was intrinsically good before God and “good” being ἀγαθός (*agathos*) referring to that which had a beneficial result in society.

Now the word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5 is ἀγαθός (*agathos*) which speaks of Kingdom fruit in the lives of others!² Paul’s final exhortation is for us to labor diligently on producing beneficial results in the lives of others.

Yet what practically does that look like? If we were to quantify and so identify that which is considered to be “good” in Scripture as it relates to the Kingdom of God, we first would note that it would be the opposite of “repaying another with evil for evil”- that is the contrast (1 Thessalonians 5:15a)! Well, if it is NOT “repaying evil for evil,” what is it? Notice, it is working for others to come to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see this in the Parable of the Four Soils.

Luke 8:15, “And the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”

Working for “good” in others is laboring NOT ONLY at proclaiming the gospel, BUT for people to embrace it, to hold to it, and never to let it go (cf. also Romans 2:7)!

Working for the good in others is also laboring for the spiritual maturation and godliness in the lives of others. Moses told the nation right before they entered the Promised Land:

Deuteronomy 30:15-16a, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity [that

which is good], and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments...”

To encourage and work for another to become that which God has called them to be is to work for that which is good in the sight of God!

Isaiah 38:3, “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Thy sight.”- this passage identifies Kingdom good as “walk[ing] before God in truth.”

Accordingly, to labor for this in the life of God’s people is to work for good in the Kingdom of God!

- Fellowshiping with Christ
- Being in the Word
- Praying
- Walking with the Lord

Luke 10:41-42, “But the Lord answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* a few things are necessary, really *only* one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.’”

What is the “good part” that Mary chose? Sitting at the feet of Christ! To work for good in the Kingdom of God is to labor at encouraging and equipping others to be in the word! It is building people up in Christ:

Romans 15:1-2, “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.”

This means that working for good in the lives of people will require you to get to know people and listen to them. What is it that builds them up? What is an encouragement to them? Discover it and meet it and you will have done good in God’s Kingdom!

Building people up in the faith requires the cultivation of a covenant ethic in the body of Christ.

Micah 6:8, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God—

To labor for “good” in others is to encourage the body of Christ also to embody hesed-love (that is the word behind “good” here [חֶסֶד (*chesed*)] which is nothing less than covenant

fidelity both to the Lord and His people. Practically speaking, Paul describes what this looks like in 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 5:9-10, “Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work.”

A covenant ethic is a life devoted to the welfare and benefit of those in the body of Christ. To labor for the body of Christ to fulfill this is to labor for good in the Kingdom of God (cf. also Romans 12:9b-13). Notice lastly, it is working to maintain the peace Christ gave to His body.

1 Peter 3:11, “And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”

We are back to our passage and that around which all of Paul’s exhortation here revolved; being at peace with God’s people. (1 Thessalonians 5:13b)!

Now putting it together, Paul exhorts us here ever and always to be prepared, equipped, and ready to work for “good” in the lives of those around us! To set our heart on this will radically transform us! It makes me think of the life that is assumed when a person attains or is given a title or calling. Have you ever wondered?

- Why is it that teachers look, think, and act a certain way?
- Why is it that lawyers look, think, and act a certain way?
- Why is there a police persona? Or a military persona?
- A professional football persona?
- Why do non-conformists look, think, and act all the same?

Is it the person who chooses the job? Or is it the job that chooses and so shapes the person? I think we would all answer, “Yes!” In our culture, we are free to choose any line of work by which to make a living.

However, we understand that once a line of work is chosen, that line of work in time will change us- how we look, how we think, what we desire, our skills, our strengths and weaknesses, and a whole lot more.

Some of the changes are unintentional... and so are not perceived by the individual. But most of the changes are purposed! When it became apparent to me that I was going to serve as both a pastor and a preacher, I gave myself to honing certain skills... way before I was ordained!

- I purposed to become a student of people- and so I studied people. I found those who were effective in ministry and asked, “Why are they effective vs. those that are not?”
- I gave myself to learning how to counsel? And so I bought and read counseling books and then tried my hand at it!
- Early on I learned that preachers are readers and so I began reading more.
- As to the craft of preaching, I began listening to sermons differently. Why was that sermon effective? Why was that sermon a dud?
- I took up the call of worship and began studying! What constitutes acceptable worship? What is unacceptable worship? And why?

All of this is what happens when you choose a calling... it very quickly chooses you!

If you haven't gotten it by now, I hope today you finally see it: God saved you that you might participate in the discipleship and growth of the body of Christ. That is the calling with which you first and foremost have been charged in Christ! What therefore ought you to do about it? Give yourself to it!

- Study ministry and study the word!
- Watch how others do it! What makes one effective and another not?
- Pray that God might change and equip you to be an effective minister!
- And gird up your loins and serve. The best way to learn is to do!

How it behooves us NOT to hear this sermon and, and like the fool of James (1:23), forget it! This sermon is NOT to be one of many *motivation talks* that you've heard and since have forgotten! RATHER this calling is one of the main things with which God would have us occupy ourselves in our time on this earth! Listen to Matthew, you all know the command:

Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.”

What is the kingdom of God? By definition, it is the reign and rule of a king over a people! Thus to seek “God's Kingdom” is to seek people, spiritually birthing them, growing them, and so maturing them- that they might submit to King Jesus! As such we read the commission Christ gave His body right before He ascended into glory. Notice, it revolved NOT around our own benefit and welfare, BUT equipping and maturing people that they might see God.

Matthew 28:18-19, “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”-

I hope you see it! This isn't JUST a good idea; RATHER it is our calling and so our commission as saved individuals! That is why it is no surprise that the final portion of Scripture that Paul

ever penned is consumed NOT with a theological clarification (as important as that may be), BUT the health and welfare of nineteen people, What was on Paul's heart as he faced death? Nineteen people who earlier in his life he called, "...his hope, his joy, and his crown of exultation" (1 Thessalonians 2:19b)!

You know what this means? If you are NOT good with people, if you are at a loss as to how to fulfill this calling, you must commit yourself this day to a change in your personality and so to growth and development as a minister in God's Kingdom!

In fact, I don't see how any in Christ could examine a passage like this and NOT be consumed by:

- Praying for a passion to love, help, and so encourage people in Christ!
- Being trained as an equippier and so an encourager of men!
- Working at being an effective minister!

That constitutes the essence of ministry in the Kingdom of God! Will you fail? Inevitably! Will you get hurt? Most certainly!! In fact, one of the themes which connects Paul's six exhortations here is that of being wronged! Get this: you cannot participate in ministry without getting hurt. Recall, the language here is charged:

- To "admonish" is to confront sinners who love their sin! You are going to get bit!
- To "encourage" is to come alongside, put your arm around another (which is to expose your vital organs), and endeavor to speak a timely word to an individual trapped by fears and worries... This a vulnerable position opening you up to deep wounds!

Recall the word Paul used for the "weak" is one and the same as diseased, which means "helping the weak" will involve dealing with stinky, smelly, and difficult people. Ministering to them will involve dirtying yourself!

To "be patient" literally is to "suffer under their wrath"! You can't minister very long without someone getting angry and biting you!

Not to "repay evil with evil" implies that in the course of ministry you will be wronged.

And always to "seek after that which is good in another" is to expose someone's immaturity (which is not an easy thing to do) and so participate in their growth.

In light of this I ask again: Will you fail? Will you get hurt? Indeed! Yet you must see that there is no other work on this side of the grave that is as noble, eternal, or important!

End Notes

¹https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/there-really-are-50-eskimo-words-for-snow/2013/01/14/e0e3f4e0-59a0-11e2-beee-6e38f5215402_story.html

² And so we read such passages as Luke 6:45 which says, “The good man [the word used throughout this verse is ἀγαθός (*agathos*)] out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” “Good” in this verse refers to spiritually beneficial deeds! In Romans 7:12, Paul wrote, “So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” The Law of God/word of God if followed will always bring about a beneficial result!