

A Worthy Life
Ephesians 4:1-16

Brothers and sisters, enough time has passed so I can tell you this story without embarrassing those involved in it...

Once upon a time our family car, a nice olive green 1980-something Plymouth Reliant K, needed fixing and my father sent it to the Chrysler dealership for repair.

One of my father's parishioners worked for that dealership, and whenever our car needed to go in he would come to the house and pick up our car and leave us whatever loaner vehicle he happened to be driving from the dealership.

This particular time, however, he left us a car which he and another mechanic at the shop had modified by swapping out the regular horn with a tractor trailer truck horn.

So instead of getting a mild "honk-honk" when you tapped the horn, you got a big old "hwwwaaaaaank" that made you jump because you thought a Semi was barreling down on you.

So my mother had picked up another lady from the church in this loaner car and they were waiting to make a left hand turn at an intersection when they recognized an approaching vehicle.

It was a very close family friend and church member... However since my mother was not driving our distinctive olive green Plymouth Reliant K car, he did not recognize her vehicle as he was speeding along trying to beat the yellow light.

And it was at that exact moment, my mom gave him a friendly honk to say hello, except that with a truck horn, it came across more like *"you jerk why are you trying to run the yellow light – get out of my way I'm turning!"*

And so, our very close family friend and church member responded by giving them the middle finger! Nice and high, right out the driver side window expressing his annoyance at whatever idiot truck driver was honking at him as he sailed through the intersection! Only to recognize, to his horror –

that it was actually the pastor's wife and another church lady as he drove past them.

And brothers and sisters, I tell you this story because – it's always better to start a sermon with a memorable story... and because it's the kind of story that illustrates what we think it means to live a life worthy of our calling as Christians that Paul speaks of in chapter 4:1.

We ought to be careful and watch what we do as Christian in public because we never know who is watching us and sees our example and witness – right?? And this chapter of Ephesians contains some much beloved verses that are often referred to and quoted about how we can live in a worthy manner. Paul says *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”* (vs 2) and *“Speak the truth in love.”* (vs 15)

And we take these verses and apply them as instructions on how we ought to behave in public towards other people in our day-to-day life so that our witness can be considered worthy.

Now brothers and sisters this is a laudable goal – and certainly the point of other verses like 1 Peter 2:12 *“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God...”*

But, this is not what the Apostle Paul is talking about here in Eph 4:1 when he says *“I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received”* or more accurately *“I urge y'all, walk worthily of the call to which y'all have been called”*

Brothers and sisters, what Paul is urging us to do here is to actually BE... the church... BE together in a certain way.

And we know this because of what Paul has been talking about in the first 3 chapters. So we'll do a quick review to help us see how he gets to this point.

Chapter 1 - the main point, the focus is to look at all the things that GOD is doing in the lives of Jews and especially Gentiles.

Chapter 2 - the main point is to teach about Grace and to

show that the Church is the best of the “good works” that Grace produces in our lives.

Chapter 3 – the main focus was to give us a BIG view of the Church so that we are awestruck and inspired by what God’s Grace has made us a part of... the Cosmic church!

And its only after these three chapters of talking about God’s actions, teaching about Grace, and giving us a BIG view of the church that Paul talks about our calling and living worthy of it.

And so, because it comes after all this, what Paul means by *“the calling to which we have been called”* is our inclusion... by God’s Grace... to become heirs to the Covenant promises that used to only be available to Israel through the Covenant of Law... but now IN Christ we receive them on an equal footing with the Jews and we are part of God’s people.

And this bringing together of Gentiles and Jews IN Christ is what Paul considers to BE the Church – and so... as the Church we display the “iridescent” wisdom of God to the mighty

angels in the Court of Heaven. So to be “called” brothers and sisters – is to BE the church, very literally in fact.

Now it might not be quite as apparent from the English translation but in the Greek – we would see the similarity of the word for church in 3:21, “*ekklesia*”, to the words for calling in 4:1 “*klesios*” and with the verb ‘to be called’ “*eklethete*.” This similarity in Greek tells us that to be called, and our calling, is to be the Church.

And to walk worthily of this calling is all about how we BE together, the concrete ways that we express our life together and having been put together with each other IN Christ.

So this exhortation is not directed to us as individuals and how we live our personal lives in front of non-christians, as important as that is – instead it’s directed to us as a group, as a local expression and manifestation of what God is doing with His grace in bringing people together IN Jesus Christ.

We know this because the “you” in vs 1 is plural – its y’all.

Now how we live our private lives is important but what Paul is focusing us on here... is that there is a new group reality – the Church – and we have been made a part of it and there are relational requirements from us since we belong to it.

I think we can understand that right? We know there are relational requirements of us if we join a sports team, or when we work with others, or when we go to a school or play in a band or are part of a club – all of these group contexts require a level of commitment, cooperation, and comradery from us.

It's no different in the Church, having been made a part of it by God's grace - except that we are "called" into the Church by God, it's not the same as the voluntary association principle by which we join other groups. In that regard it's like being born a member of a family, or born a citizen of a country – you don't choose those groups.

And that places a much higher level of importance upon our obedience to live worthily through responding with our

commitment, cooperation and comradery in Church than it does for other groups that we are voluntarily associated with.

In fact – we will discover as we continue to study Ephesians that our calling into the Church has implications that affects the relationships we have with other groups and how we identify and participate in them.

But for the first part of chapter 4 Paul wants to help us understand that Church is first and foremost about how we BE together – living worthily of the calling to which we are called.

Now when most people think about "church" they think about attending a worship service on a Sunday morning where you sing songs, listen to a sermon and take the Lord's Supper and have some coffee and hopefully it doesn't go too long...

But what Paul wants us to understand is that gathering together for worship isn't about attending a service – it's BEING the Church together and confessing and acknowledging and expressing the things which make us into that group.

And his instruction to be humble and gentle and patient and bearing with one another in love is because the Church is specifically being constructed out of people who were former enemies and hated each other... Jews and Gentiles.

And so we also need this instruction for how we treat each other and deal with each other because brothers and sisters – being called into the Church by God’s grace in Christ means you don’t get to pick who your fellow members are...

We may find that we’re stuck with people whom we normally wouldn’t get along with and we wouldn’t want to be around - so we need that humility and gentleness and patience and forbearance to deal with each other as God places us together in this thing called Church and starts to unify us.

It’s kind of like that 80’s movie where the high-school jock, stoner, nerd, rebel, and prom queen all end up in Saturday morning detention together and end up finding common ground which unifies them in spite of their diverse high-school

identities which separate them, and they become a new group... The Breakfast Club.

And while we don’t face quite the challenge of overcoming the kind of animosity that existed between Jews and Gentiles in our local church - because so much time has passed since this first started – we still have our own “high-school identities” which separate us and make it unlikely that we would be together outside of church and can even bring some conflict between us.

We come from all sorts of different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds, we are part of different socio-economic groups, we work in different industries and professions, and we all have different personalities, family backgrounds and preferences and styles...

Furthermore these differences can easily become to opportunity for conflict with each other right? They can turn into racism, classism, discrimination, polarization which only amplifies the separation distinction from each other.

But IN Christ we are being brought together, connected to each other, and unified to form a new group... and that is why it's so important to BE physically present and participating when we gather together on Sundays or for other Church activities.

I know many of us struggle with busy work schedules, family obligations, and it's a challenge to get up on time to gather together on Sundays on a regular basis – I get that...

I believe Paul does too – many of the new believers he writes to had turned away from worshipping pagan gods, and as I remember my studies of Greek and Roman religion I don't recall that people regularly gathered together for worship as a group the way Christians did.

I remember it being far more individualistic where they went to the temple to offer a sacrifice, or say a prayer, or you had a little shrine in your home, and it was all about appeasing the gods to bless you and make your life more favorable. *(Do we practice Christianity in the same way?)*

So the whole idea of interrupting one's daily life to take time to regularly gather with other Christians to worship together was pretty radical – but when you realize how BIG this thing called Church is - you want to be a part of it...

When you experience how God's Grace is bringing you together IN Christ with people whom you would otherwise be at odds with – you realize this is the best way to express it...

You know you need to BE there – and you understand that your physical presence and participation as part of the Church group is what it really means to live a life worthy of having been called into the Church. That's why Hebrews 10:25 says *"let us NOT give up meeting together!"*

BE-ing at Church is BE-ing The Church! It is showing, demonstrating, how you – we - are really connected with others in Christ – it's so much deeper than simply attending church. Are you starting to see what Paul is getting at here?

Now how does this coming together IN Christ happen? Well in vs. 5-6 Paul says “There is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called; **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all”

So we see with all the emphasis on the “one” that the unity of BE-ing Church IN Christ happens as we learn and experience, participate, affirm doctrine, teach and share together about these different aspects of Jesus Christ when we are gathered.

We confess we believe that Jesus Christ had a physical body – we learn and come to understand how that was an integral part of securing our forgiveness and redemption so that we are made a part of His spiritual body...

We know that Jesus promised to send us the Holy Spirit when He returned to the Father – the Spirit of Jesus is the Spirit of God – and the Spirit is the sign and seal that we have been given salvation in Jesus.

So that is our hope – and we don’t hope in anyone else other than Jesus... and Jesus is also the only Lord, he has been raised above all other powers, gov’ts and spiritual authorities, as Paul has explained in 1:20-21. So there is only one Lord – and the proper and correct teaching about Jesus means there is only one faith – one gospel message - about Jesus.

There is one Baptism – which means that Jesus’ baptism of repentance was sufficient to repent on All our behalf... and that there is only one way that we connect to Jesus to receive all His benefits, chief of which is knowing God, and that is through the Holy Spirit immersing (*baptizing*) us into Him and then we are reconnected to God the Father.

Which is why Paul finished this list saying there is only one God and Father of all – all being those who are IN Christ.

And we are unified and brought together when we not only learn about and understand the teaching on this – but when we experience it, act on it, and talk about it, sing and pray

about it as we gather together... so again this is what Paul considers to be living worthily of our calling to be the Church.

And it's important that we understand this is HOW we are united IN Christ in spite of our differences because there is a pseudo-unity that is being actively promoted and endorsed in our society, and it has deceived many people in the church.

This pseudo-unity attempts to make us think we are all the same by minimizing or eliminating that which differentiates us from each other, offering truisms and platitudes that we can all agree with like *"we are all equal"* *"I don't see race"* and *"I'm spiritual but not religious"* and *"love wins."*

And if that fails to work, or if the differences are too obvious to deny or impossible to eliminate, then this pseudo-unity demands these differences be overcome by celebration, affirmation and legislation.

Now the wisdom of this approach for dealing with the social challenges in our society is debatable – it has some pros and cons, but we shouldn't be deceived into thinking or

advocation that this is how unity comes about in the church, that is to fall into the error of promoting false teaching.

Of course this is nothing new – when Paul wrote this letter people were offering and promoting false teaching then too. That's why Paul writes what he does in vs. 14-15 about being blown about by crafty people and their scheming and that instead that we must mature and speak the truth... in love.

You can't bring about real unity by minimizing or eliminating differences between people, or forcing acceptance through legislation, instead unity comes when these differences are put in proper place and perspective because we are ALL focusing on, participating in, and identifying ourselves with these aspects of Jesus Christ that Paul presents to us here.

Do you see the difference? It's very important that we do – because we don't want to be deceived and unknowingly promote pseudo-unity in the Church. That's not promoting Christ or building up the church IN Christ.

Now becoming unified is not an easy process to be a part of and it's not an easy task to work at, many things work against it – but Paul encourages us by stating in vs. 7 that Jesus Christ supplies what we need to work towards this unity in Himself, by giving the church gifts - listed in vs. 11 - the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.

Now, I've often taught that these are particular spiritual gifts that people receive to be used to equip Christ's people for works of service and thus build up the Church.

But having studied this verse in the context of the whole chapter, and in light of the previous three chapters, perhaps we might view these as sources given by Jesus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, where we find the content and correct teaching about the aspects of Christ that unify us.

The Apostles are the primary source for passing on the teachings of Jesus as they were his disciples and sat under his teaching. The Prophets represent the Old Testament material that points to and teach us about Jesus as well.

And I will suggest that the Evangelists (literally a gospel-er) are those who wrote down the good news about Jesus in what we know as the Gospels so that as Luke 1:3-4 says people would have a *“carefully investigated, orderly account... to know the certainty of the things you have been taught”*

Which is where the teaching pastors come in, (*the Greek suggests this combination of the words instead of separate nouns*) people like Timothy and Titus whom Paul had put in charge of local churches to make sure correct teaching and instruction about Christ and the faith was being given and any misunderstanding or errors were detected and corrected.

But regardless if these five categories are spiritual-gifts in the classic sense or Spirit inspired sources of truth about Jesus, the purpose and goal of these gifts is to build up the Church to unity – which leads to our maturity and fullness in Jesus Christ.

And when we are mature and full of Jesus Christ then it is possible to keep the unity of the Body of Christ with each other – even when other members, by accident or on

purpose, happen to give us a rude gesture in return for our attempts to be friendly to them. We can forgive, they can apologize – reconciliation and explanations can occur.

But more importantly being unified IN Christ with all these other people whom God has brought into the Church changes us - we start to become more committed to BE-ing AT and with each other as a Church, we become more compassionate towards each other, we become more cooperative with each other, and we experience more comradery with each other...

And then brothers and sisters - when we are unified in Christ, and committed and compassionate and cooperative and there is comradery - we are in a safe place where we can be confronted...

Because as God calls us and brings into the church, from all the different places we come from in our lives with all our different backgrounds and experiences – we also bring along all our baggage as well right?

And not all of that that baggage is helpful and conducive to building up the body and continuing to unify us in Christ and it needs to be dealt with and that means we need to be confronted about it – BUT... and this is very important Confrontation should only come after our experience of being IN Christ has started to unify us and we have become more committed, compassionate, cooperative and have comradery.

Otherwise it's too easy for a friendly and well-intentioned “honk” to be taken as a critical and rejecting “hwwwaaaank!” and we injure a part of the body instead of correcting it.

And that's exactly how Paul has structure this letter of Ephesians – so next week in the second half of chapter 4 we'll be ready to be confronted – in love – about things in our lives that need to go...

Because – brothers and sisters – we need to live worthily of the calling to which we have been called.

BE the Church - together. Amen.