

# Our Worthy Calling

Ephesians 4:1-16

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ August 5, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church  
A Service of Ordination for Greg Rapier

<sup>1</sup>I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

<sup>9</sup>(When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended<sup>[a]</sup> into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>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.

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Before you begin a new job it's always very helpful to receive a job description, a precise summary of the things which will be required of you in the days to come. Greg, when you started work delivering pizzas for Round Table a couple years ago, I'm assuming you received some sort of job description, even if it was just verbal. No job description includes everything, of course. There are always "other duties as assigned".

I'm sure nobody told you at Round Table that part of your job included getting robbed. Still, it's good to know what to expect.

I chose this text from Ephesians for this afternoon because I think it gives the most precise job description there is in the New Testament for this next job you are about to begin, Greg, that of a pastor. As a bonus, the text here also hints at the job description for the church, making it a text worthy of all our attention. In fact, the essence of your calling as a pastor and the essence of our calling as the church are all tied up here together.

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Paul begins here by begging us to lead a life "**worthy of the calling to which you have been called.**" This is the basic calling of the gospel itself, that we are to trust in Jesus Christ as not only the crucified and risen Lord, but the sovereign King over all creation, and trust in him to the point that we give him our complete and undivided allegiance for the rest of our lives.<sup>1</sup> Is there a higher calling in life? Not even close. Paul begs us to let our lives reflect that calling.

How? Paul gets specific right away. Though he talks about humility and gentleness, patience and forbearance, all of it is driving towards one thing, unity. Unity is absolutely central to our calling as followers of Christ. In fact, Paul says that we are to spare *no effort* when it comes to maintaining the "**unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**" We are to employ haste, and passion, and will, and sentiment, and strength, and attitude, and resources, everything we have, to protect and nurture unity among God's people in the church. In the following verse Paul goes over the top belaboring his point that as believers we are united. "**There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**" For Paul, unity in the church is a non-negotiable. It's who we are in Christ. We are one, just as God is one, united by the Spirit in ways that go far deeper than we might imagine.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm indebted to N.T. Wright for some of the language here from *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Westminster John Knox, 2002), 43.

So why was unity in the church so essential to Paul? Could it be because unity in the church was so essential to Christ? Do you remember what it was that Jesus said would be the essential mark that would distinguish his followers from the rest of world? How will the world be able to recognize Christians? They will know you are my disciples by your orthodox doctrine. Right? Is that what Jesus said? They will know you are my disciples because of the way you vote in the election. They will know you are my disciples by the way you spend your Sunday mornings. They will know you are my disciples by the way you care for the poor. They will know you are my disciples by the bumper stickers on your car.

No. What did Jesus say? They will know you are my disciples by the way you love one another.<sup>2</sup> Not the way you love the world, but by the way you love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The unity people see in the church, a unity that bridges every other thing in us that otherwise might divide us, that is to be the distinguishing mark of the church to the world, the thing that people see and then say, “They must be followers of Jesus. How else could you explain that people who should never love each other do love each other?”

Sadly, unity is so lacking in our world today. We live in a divided world. We always have. At some points along the way we do a better job of faking it, but it’s always been divided. So many lines drawn between us – racial lines, nationalistic lines, political lines, generational lines, religious lines, gender lines, and probably above all personality lines that divide people who flat out just don’t like each other. Everywhere – I mean *literally* everywhere – you look these days people are divided.

The church is meant to be different. By nature, we *are* different! The one Spirit, of our one Lord, through our one faith and one baptism and one calling, is meant to unite us in Christ across every other dividing line that exists, and do so to such an extent that the rest of the world can’t believe their eyes. In fact, as I heard somebody recently put it, if the church does not demonstrate this kingdom unity and love with one another then we become a laughing stock to the rest of the world because the message we proclaim is hollow.

We are literally Christ’s body in this world in a tangible and concrete sense and as a body we are called to peace, wholeness and flourishing together. We are bound to Christ and, through Christ, to one another in the church as brothers and sisters more than we are bound to anybody else. We are Americans today, but America

will someday fade away. We will not be Americans forever. Our national borders, like all national borders, are only temporary. Our family structures will also fade away. We are husbands and wives, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, only for this life. In the Kingdom of God we all have one Father and so find ourselves brothers and sisters for eternity. You might say that the DNA of my soul is not distinctly American or even Chapman. It is of Christ and, therefore, binds me eternally to those who share that DNA. Even if you and I share absolutely nothing in common except for Christ, in a sense we then share everything in common.

Our unity, however, does not dilute our diversity. Think about the human body. My body is unified. Same DNA throughout. Same blood type throughout. Each part and each system working in harmony with one another, though granted the performance level of some of the systems seems to be diminishing as time goes by! But each part, though united to one another, is also unique. Nobody has ever mistaken my ear for my eye, my hand for my foot, my kidney for my spleen. Similarly, in the church we are to celebrate our diversity in the context of our unity. Nobody wants a body that is all unity and no diversity. In fact, the reason the world is supposed to stand up and take notice of the unity in the church is that it happens in spite of radical diversity. How do people who are so different from one another love each other? That never happens. So how does it happen in the church?

In verses 7-10, Paul has this somewhat confusing description of Christ ascending and descending to give gifts to his people. The point of it all is that Christ has gone to great lengths to give different gifts to different parts of his body, the church, so that the church might be equipped to live a life worthy of it’s calling as Christ’s body, unified in love as a witness to the world. In verse 11, Paul says that some of those gifts include that, “**some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.**” It just so happens that one of those gifts, the gift of pastor and teacher, is the gift that you have been given, Greg. That’s why we are here today, to celebrate that gift in you and to ordain you to use it as it was intended to be used. So let me take a few moments to speak specifically about this gift you have been given, especially in light of the unity it is meant to promote among God’s people.

First, the gift of pastor/teacher is not a more important gift than the other gifts. It’s distinct, but not better. Just like being an eye in the body is not better than being an ear. The body needs both. I’ll say more about that in a minute, but it’s good for you to never forget that being a pastor doesn’t make you more important or

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<sup>2</sup> See John 13:35

essential than others in the church. Christ alone is the head. He is the only one to be worshipped.

Second, notice that the gift of pastor/teacher, like the other gifts, is service-oriented by nature. Paul writes that the purpose of all these gifts is, **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,<sup>3</sup> 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.”** Your work as a pastor, therefore, is to build up the body of Christ, not to build up the office of pastor. Same for me. In fact, if you do your work faithfully, in submission to Christ, there will be many times when your own status or reputation may suffer because of it.

Some years ago a friend of mine taught me this prayer to pray before I preach. “Lord, when this sermon is done I want people to think well of me. But whether or not they leave here thinking well of me, I pray they will leave here thinking well of you.” That’s honest. We want people to like us. Nothing wrong with that. But if we lead and teach in obedience to Christ there will be times that we are not liked. That’s okay. It’s not about us. It’s about Christ. We are called to serve people for his sake, not ours.

Third, I want to encourage you as a pastor to stay in your lane. You are one part of the body, not the whole body. And while there will be “other duties as assigned” along the way, I believe that as a pastor there are two primary duties in your job description, both given for the sake of the unity and health of the body. Trust me, there is going to be immense pressure along the way to give yourself to other tasks, so you must zealously commit yourself to these two.

To begin with, you are to give yourself to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in your teaching and preaching. You have been given these past three years at seminary, and in the years to come you will be given many hours each week as a pastor, to devote yourself to the study of God’s Word for the purpose of feeding the flock to which you have been assigned as an under-shepherd. You are to proclaim the whole of God’s Word, the parts you don’t like as much as the parts you do like, because all of scripture is, as you are about to promise in your ordination vows that you believe it to be, “by the Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to you.”<sup>3</sup> Preaching and

teaching the gospel is absolutely central to your calling as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament.

Second – and Paul is very clear on this here – pastors are to give themselves to equipping the saints for the work of ministry. In other words, I am not supposed to do the work of the ministry but rather my job is to call and teach and equip the people of the church themselves to do the work of ministry. To use a sports analogy, Greg, you’re not on the team. You’re the coach. A pastor is not an all-star, but on the bench, in the gym, in the film-room, doing everything he or she can do to help the players succeed on the field.

In Acts 6 the elders in the early church were trying to teach and lead and also take care of all the needs of the widows in the church. It wasn’t working. They weren’t staying in their lane and as a result essential functions in the church were being neglected. In response, the church wisely appointed deacons to take one essential function, pastoral care, so that the elders could focus on another essential function, teaching the Word of God.<sup>4</sup>

We have some work to do in this area, both as pastors and as the church. A good first step is to ask what it is that pastors are uniquely called to do and then realize that all the other tasks in the church are tasks that others in the church can do as well as, if not better than, pastors. Pastors are to teach and equip. That’s our primary calling in the body. Pastoral care, therefore, is an example of something that ought to be done primarily by the congregation, people caring for one another when we are in need. Prayer is also not a unique calling for pastors. When the congregation gathers, don’t always look to pastors to lead in prayer. Discipleship is the work of the church, not solely of pastors. Evangelism is the work of the church, not just pastors.

I love how theologian John Stott puts it, “Ministry [in the church] is not the prerogative of a clerical elite but the privileged calling of the people of God.”<sup>5</sup> Part of what gets in the way of this, to be honest, is pastors (and I’m guilty of this) who don’t stay in their lane and attempt to do the work of the church which was meant for the church itself to do. When each part of the body does what it was called and gifted to do, however, the church flourishes in these ways: unity of faith and knowledge of Christ; and maturity of character, even to the full measure of the stature of Christ.

In the final verses of this passage Paul is specific about some other results of the church, pastors and the rest of

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<sup>3</sup> From the Constitutional Questions for Ordination, Installation and Commissioning of the Presbyterian Church (USA), *Book of Order 2015-2017* (The Office of the General Assembly, 2015), 122.

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<sup>4</sup> See Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>5</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 167.

us, being the church we are meant to be. Let me just point out a few things. Each of them, as we might expect by now, has something to do with the unity which is essential to our calling and witness in this world.

First, our doctrine unifies us. When God's Word is faithfully and boldly proclaimed in the church, especially by those with the gift to do so, we cease to be, in Paul's words, like children **"tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming."** In spite of his mixed metaphor, I trust you get his point. There are lots of things we admire in children, but this is not one of them. Children will believe nearly anything told to them by an adult. Think of the things we tell children about visitors who come down the chimney at Christmas, or hop through our yard at Easter, or sneak under our pillows after a loose tooth has finally fallen out. And they swallow it all whole. It's why we work so hard to surround our kids with trustworthy adults. As adults living in this world, however, we are not surrounded by trustworthy adults and so we must not believe everything we are told in this world because a great deal of it flatly contradicts that which God's Word says is true. The teachings of scripture, in fact, will often be unpopular, inconvenient, even despised by the world. But they still are the truth, so they must anchor us.

With that in mind, truth itself is the second thing that unites us. Paul encourages us here, in fact, to speak the truth to one another. In love, yes, and we'll get to that in a minute. But don't rush past the truth part too quickly. The church needs to be a place where I hear not only the truth about God but also the truth about myself as well. The world wants to tell me, "You be you", but I don't need to hear that from the church because there is a great deal in me that isn't supposed to be in me. The church, of course, needs to love me as I am today because Christ loves me as I am today, but the church also needs to love me enough to point out to me the ways I am not yet reflecting the measure of the full stature of Christ.

That truth, of course, must always be spoken in love, which is the third thing, perhaps the most important thing, which unites and distinguishes us as the church. Love without truth is squishy and feeble. Truth without love, however, is too hard and distasteful to receive. I don't want to hear the truth from you, in person or from the pulpit, if I don't know that your love for me keeps my best interests in mind. But when the love of Christ that flows not only to us but then through us flavors everything we do, even hard truth we may have to speak to one another, then the church becomes his body moving rhythmically and easily with

one another, efficient and graceful in response to Christ<sup>6</sup>, and ready to bear witness to his love and grace to the watching world.

Think about how it is that you best come to know, or even love, another person. It's through their body, right? Their physical presence. Sure, you can read my Facebook page and learn something about me. You can hear about me second hand from others who know me. You can read letters I've written, listen to songs I've composed, reflect on art I've created. And in all of these things you can learn something about me. But nothing can replace proximity. Face to face conversations. Walking or working together side by side. Sharing a meal around the same table. Watching in real time to see how I react and respond to circumstances or people. It is in the physical presence of people that we come to know them best.

With that in mind, what is the best chance the world has of coming to know Christ? It's through his body, right, his physical presence here on earth. That is us, the church; we are his body. I know people will say, for instance, that the best place to get to know God is in nature. I don't buy it. You can come to know that there is *a god* by looking at the wonder of the natural world, but mountains or oceans don't tell you much about what that god is like, other than that he or she is powerful and creative.<sup>7</sup> That's a start, of course, but ultimately it is through God's Word, the specific incarnated and then written revelation of Himself, that people come to know the true nature of the God who formed the universe. And his Word is best encountered in his body, the church, which proclaims *and* embodies it. Specifically, it is through the church, astonishingly unified across all other lines that otherwise divide, that the world comes to know Christ and the grace and love he is poised to lavish on anybody who would receive him in faith.

The church is not the hope of the world. I've heard it put that way before, but I don't agree. *Christ* is the hope of the world! But it is through his body, the church, that the world discovers that hope. This is the high and sacred calling we have been given, not just pastors but all of us who count ourselves followers of Christ. So along with Paul, I beg us all to lead lives worthy of this calling.

Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> I'm borrowing language here from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Ephesians 4:12-13 in *The Message* (NavPress, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:18-23 speaks about our lost ability to truly know the fullness of God simply through the created order.