

"What can I share with your church that would be helpful?" Nate suggested I could share where I believed the Church going. My first thought was where the Church should be going. When I was in seminary in 1971, the U.S. was going through a radical revolution; in my day it was known as 'the sexual revolution' but it was really 'an authority revolution'. We continue to suffer its impact 50 years later. A pastor came to our school and shared **Eph. 4:1-16**. I had never seen or even heard of such a church. Life-changing week for me.

In **1:1-3:21**, Paul has emphasized who God is, what He has done, and who He has made us. He closes this section with his amazing prayer in **3:16-21**: be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, not only lay hold of but experience Jesus' love, and, be filled up to all the fullness of God. This is possible for every Christian. It's also how to pray for one another.

In light of this, Paul begs them to walk worthy! This is the process of becoming in our thinking/choices/speech/behavior who God has already made us by nature. **Eph. 4:1-16**, the *Church's* walk, our way of operation as a Body.

Read 4:1-6. This is one long sentence, which Paul has a tendency to do! Paul tells them to "Walk worthy of your calling (:1). Preserve the unity of the Spirit (:2-3). And, remember the essentials that hold us together (:4-6)."

:1 Paul considered himself the Lord's prisoner, not Rome's. "I **beg of you please**; I call you (present tense) to my side." **Walk worthy**, this means to balance the scales so one side is equal to the other. Give equal weight in your lives to Biblical truth and your walk! God's first concern is not what the Church does but what the Church - Once we understand who we now are, we will want to walk like who God has made us!

:2-3 The worthy walk as 'one new man' (**2:15**) is characterized by **Humility**, regarding another and his/her interests as more important than my own. **Gentleness**, strength under God's control (a fruit of the Spirit, Gal **5:22-23**). **Patience**, long-tempered (another piece of fruit). It isn't revengeful. **Showing tolerance**, bearing with, mutually accepting each other where they are in their walk, the way our Lord does with us. This is Jesus in action, through us.

In **love**, God's agape love, which seeks another's highest good (another piece of fruit). It's not romantic love or even friendship love; it is agape love, a love that willingly, unconditionally, gives whether it receives anything in return!

When we as the Church are walking in a manner worthy of our calling, these qualities of **2** are present. When not walking this way, division and disunity will result. Qualities seen individually and collectively in each life and church.

:3 Recognize the one new man God has made us and live in light of that wonderful truth! **Being diligent, zealous, eager, to** (continually) **preserve the unity of the Spirit**. We are to strive to maintain a unity that is already ours!! Make every effort to preserve the unity, **in the bond of peace**, joined together as the one we are. This unity is on display when practicing **3:16-21**.

In **:4-6** we have the spiritual essentials that hold us together. **:4 One Body**: one Body under one Head, Jesus. We were placed by the Spirit into the one Body of Christ when we became Christians. **Yon(!) are the Body of Christ**

(1 Cor. 12:27). One Spirit: each believer is indwelt by and sealed by the same Holy Spirit (**1:13-14, 4:30**). He's made our physical bodies His dwelling place, individually and collectively. **Called in one hope of your calling**: Jesus is our hope and certainty, both now and in the future.

:5 One Lord: Master, King, ultimate Authority: His name is Jesus. Jesus' Lordship is essential. **One faith**: the faith by which all saints enter into salvation, Jesus being the object of our faith. (It could also mean faith in a body of truth (**Jude 3**), the content of what we believe.) **One baptism**: in the context this is not water baptism; it means to place into, the baptism of the Holy Spirit placing each believer into the one Body of Christ (**1 Cor. 12:13**).

:6 One God who is our Father: the Father of all who believe. We are one family, with one God and Father. Such conviction should tie us more closely than any human tie. Our unity isn't based on what we 'do' but rather upon our one God our Father, Lord, and Helper, and, who He has made us.

These 7 essentials are the basis for the unity we are to make every effort to preserve! When together, we can't create spiritual unity, but, we can *recognize and practice* the unity we already have! Let's make personal **:1-6**.

In **4:7-10 (read)**, the writer Paul turns from 'all' of us in the one Body of Christ to 'each' of us in the Body, from the unity in the Church to the variety, especially revealed by the different gifts Jesus has given. Unity doesn't mean sameness. The exalted, ascended Jesus giving different gifts is the emphasis.

:7 Grace not only saves God's people (**2:5,8**) but also equips us for service and building up. Each was given a gift (dorea), a part to play. "Not to use our Christ-given gifts is an affront to our Lord's wisdom and grace and a loss to His Church." The 'g_r_a_c_e' given in **:7** includes the power and ministries and gifts that enable us to function best exactly where we are in the Body. The worthy walk of the Church includes Christians discovering and lovingly exercising their Christ-given gifts. Within the unity of the Body, each member has a distinctive part to play. Like an orchestra with different members and instructions and music, from the Head of the Church! What makes the Church healthy and vibrant? Practicing unity and using our spiritual gifts. A Body, containing diverse but essential and contributing parts. This is the provision made by Jesus and the Spirit for the Body's operation and growth. Each member is unique in terms of his/her contribution to the Body, a uniqueness that frees us from comparing, competing, boasting, or inferiority. We each contribute yet we also need other members functioning. By simply doing what we were individually designed to do, we begin to walk worthy and we begin to exercise our grace-given gifts, and Jesus is seen. Neither our gifts nor our areas of service nor the results are alike. These gifts are the best gifts He could give to you and your local church. Jesus has gifted you to play a part-here!

:8-10 A (parenthesis) to explain how Jesus received the right to graciously give the gifts. Paul uses this OT picture of God (**Ps. 68**) and relates this to Jesus. Like a military victor, as Conqueror, Jesus received gifts (doma) that He rightly deserves and then turns right around and gives many of those gifts

back to the saints so they can love/equip/serve/build up the Body of Christ.

:9-10 Christ descended from heaven to earth, referring to when He became flesh (**Phil. 2:6-8**): "The great depth of the incarnation." Then Christ ascended from earth to heaven where He reigns forever with His Father (see **1:19-23**).

Spiritual gifts are God-given abilities that have been given to every Christian to minister to others (**1 Pet. 4:10**). & when we're operating as we can/should, people will see Jesus (**4:13**)!! We're to continually rely upon the resurrected, ascended, exalted, gift-giving Lord Jesus. What does this look like in action?

In **:11-16**, we see the Church is like a jigsaw puzzle, with each member being an individual piece and playing an important part in the Church's walk. By themselves, the individual pieces may look a bit strange at times(!), but joined together in Christ, we produce a beautiful picture of Jesus! Each individual piece is vital to the complete picture. Each of us is to be equipped to play our role in the Body of Christ. So Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) gave each of us spiritual gifts. 4 of these 20 gifts are for the equipping of the saints. We are to be equipped fill the saints (all of them, each of us) can serve and build up others, and the end result of God's plan is Jesus' life being seen, through us!

Read :11-13. :11 'He' is emphasized! Jesus is none other than the ascended, exalted Lord Jesus Christ who fills the Body with Himself and has given us grace and gifts. **Some apostles:** Ones sent forth. "I. commissioned them to lay the foundation of the Church, proclaim My words, and be witnesses of Me." Church planters? **Some prophets:** Ones who speak forth God's truth. "I. gave some to use My Word to edify and encourage and comfort. They received My message for the people that was appropriate to their situation." **Some evangelists:** Ones who proclaim God's good-news about Jesus. "I. gave some the spiritual ability to communicate the good news of Me and My work to a world lost in sin (**2:1-3**). Evangelists, boldly invite listeners into a personal relationship with Me, Jesus the Savior and Lord. You'll mainly use your gift outside of the church gathering, but be sure to equip other believers also." **Some pastors and teachers:** Ones who both pastor (shepherd) and instruct. "I. gave some the spiritual ability to shepherd the flock of God, feed the flock My words, and equip the flock to find and use their spiritual gifts."

Those with these 4 gifts are to equip the saints, so the unity and variety of the Body will show up in everyone serving, building up, maturing, and speaking God's truth in love. One doesn't have to be on 'staff to have these 4 gifts.

:12 This verse describes the purpose of Jesus giving the gifts and the 4 specific gifts. The ultimate work of the Body of Christ among Christians and in the world is to be done by the saints (holy ones, every Christian), all of them (us). This is God's plan for His Church: equipping the saints so they (we) can serve and build up others. Equipped saints are to use their Lord Jesus-given spiritual gifts in their Lord Jesus-given areas of service.

Equip means to complete what is lacking and perfect what is already there. It means putting something in the condition in which it ought to be. Train Christians in who God is, His work, the new covenant, who they are in Christ,

how to walk, their spiritual gifts, to be involved in serving and building up. The Word is what is to be used to train Christians in what to know, how to live, and what we can do. Wherever we go, be the Church God has made us and make disciples! The world shouldn't need to come to a church building to find/see Jesus!

Work of service is practical service to anyone, a work characterized by service, like a table-waiter serving a meal. Being equipped, we begin to serve, using our gifts wherever Jesus gives us opportunity. **Building up.** Being equipped, we begin to reach out to brothers and sisters in Christ, the goal being to help each other grow toward spiritual maturity. When serving and building up, be sure you are using the spiritual gift-mix that our Lord Jesus gave you.

So first, there is personal spiritual growth, and then a sharing with others God's Word, Jesus' love, and your gift-mix. We gather to worship, be equipped, nurture, fellowship, educate, train; then we go into the world to let our Jesus-filled lives overflow. Our unity and love for each other are proof that we are Jesus' followers (Jn. 13:35, 17:21). We use God's words to train Christians in what to know, how to live, and what we can do. If we're just hiring staff to do the work of service and build up, the congregation remains as small as the abilities and gifts of the staff. When I was growing up, we 'hired a pastor' so he could do everything! They each burned out or left.

:13 A Biblically equipped, faithfully serving, and spiritually growing church achieves maturity! The qualities of **:13** are reached when **:11-12** are being practiced. All of us together, each practicing his/her God-given role.

Unity of the faith: one faith, in the one Person, the Lord Jesus. **The knowledge of the Son of God:** this is a discerning, recognizing, experiential knowledge of God's Son!! **A mature man:** becoming a complete, full-grown, fully-developed adult; having reached its end. **The measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ:** "The Church comes of age... and looks like Jesus!" Jesus is the standard of our spiritual maturity as a Church.

"The Church is here on earth, not to do better what other groups can do, but to do what no other group can possibly do. We're here to manifest the life and love and power of the Lord Jesus Christ!" Oh my!! Yes, growing can be painful and risky, with more responsibility taken, reaching out beyond ourselves, but God's plan is that we grow up into Him who is the Head, even Jesus (**:15**), serving and building up as He did. See how essential you are (**:16**)!

God placed you where you are in Jesus' Body (see **1 Cor. 12:7,11-13,18**). Jesus through the Spirit gave you the gifts you have. Grow up (**:14-16**).

The growth and ministry of a local church is not the obligation of a few Christians but the responsibility and privilege of every Christian. Each of us and every local church is responsible to follow God's plan as laid out in **Eph. 4:1-16**. Walk worthy! Make every effort to preserve the unity. Recognize the variety in the Body by the differing spiritual gifts. Make sure you're being equipped. Get involved in serving others and building up fellow members of the Body of Christ. Truth it in love. Together let's keep our focus on our Head, Jesus, because it's all about Him. This is where the Church should be headed!