

Ephesians 4:1-32 “Living As The Body of Christ”- Rev. Amanda A. Nevin

Introduction: The apostle Paul in all of his letters to the various churches he wrote to always started by instructing the church in theology or literally a study of God; Who is God, what has God done for his people and who are the people in relationship to this great God. The letter was first a study on God with a section then on practical advice on how to apply the knowledge we have of God to our every day lives. Ephesians is no exception. In the first 3 chapters Paul lays the ground work for our belief. We are to remember that God is the author of our faith; and it is only through the work of Christ that sin has been conquered and we can now have a relationship with God because of Christ's work on the cross. He speaks at length of our sin and our separation from God in order to show us where we were without Christ and where we would be with out faith in Christ. Paul reminds us that we were chosen before creation to be his people but not without faith in Christ. Christ gave his life for us and now we are to live out that grace with our actions, our service and our commitment to the church. The second half of Ephesians then is the practical part of the letter; it is the instruction manual on how we are to live out our faith and service to Christ individually and corporately.

Read the passage

Paul starts off chapter 4 by pleading with the church to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. But how do we live a life worthy of the calling? What does this look like? Worthy at its basic meaning means to have worth or value. It means to have a worth equal to one's position. Think of someone who is a worthy opponent- when someone is a worthy opponent their skills and gifts are equal to our own. In the Greek the word for worthy refers to a balance, or a scale. Think of a scale- in order for it to be balanced 2 things must be equal. So when Paul is using this image to describe worthy he is pointing us back to a scale- a scale of faith if you will. Paul wants us to always be mindful of balancing what it is that we believe with how we act. There is danger when we let ourselves become out of balance; for example there are those among us who believe that it is more important to just study God's word. As long as we study God's word and we read the Bible that is enough for our faith but that puts too much weight on just the study of God and none on the practical. There is danger in studying too much and not living out our faith. We may say we are learning but if the learning never goes beyond on the book then the lesson is not taking root in our hearts. It becomes a good topic of conversation but doesn't change the way we treat people, how we deal with difficult moments in our lives and so on. There are others among us who do the opposite who believe that as long as we just do, serve, worship etc. we don't need to study that much and yet if we only ever serve and do and never take time to go deeper in the scriptures then we may be missing some of the lessons that God is teaching us we will have a baby faith that when trials and tribulations comes shakes our faith to the core and we become discouraged and disheartened and may even be tempted to walk away from faith altogether. To live a life worthy of the calling means that we are balanced between the two; we take time to study and we take time to live out our faith neither is more important than the other but together they go hand in hand. To live a life worthy then is to live a life where the head and the heart are in balance where we are studying and living out our

faith as a whole. For Paul we have unity in our hearts and our minds both as individuals and in the church as a whole.

What does unity look like? Think of this puzzle piece for a moment. It has a unique shape, color, design to it. By itself the piece is not much of anything, you can't determine yet where it fits into the rest of the picture and what life to the picture it will bring; alone it doesn't really seem to do much. And yet it has a specific spot in the puzzle itself without it the other parts of the puzzle are incomplete. Paul reminds us in our passage that there is one Spirit, one Lord, One faith; so to are we called to be of Spirit, one Lord and one faith. Christ doesn't say you all have to be robots and be exactly the same- rather in the rest of this passage Paul tells us that we are uniquely equipped and gifted to serve this one body, this one Lord. Christ gave different gifts to different people so that we can together be the body of Christ, so that together we can be unified in our service, witness and ministry to the resurrection. Like the puzzle piece we each have an important role and an important part in God's picture, in God's plan without you we have a missing piece. Christ longs for us to be unified as we worship, study and live out our faith as a community but Paul recognizes that we are each different. We have our own strengths and weaknesses that add the life and ministry of this church and this community and each are called to find our place in this picture. Unity means a unity of belief in Christ himself, this is why Paul starts off with God. We need to know and understand who Christ is first and then through our study and our understanding we are called to be committed to the truth we have experienced in Christ. This means that our words should be honest and that our actions should reflect Christ's heart. What is so important about unity as part of living out a life worthy of our calling? Because Christ desires it! There are infinite number of issues that can divide us; theology, worship style, race, language, issues with church members; disagreements on money or programs or the way we see our community life together; what our mission should be in Novato or in the world; and so on. Christ longs though for us to be unified in our love and service of him. For when we are unified, when we are serving and worshipping together despite our differences, when we can come to the table with humility and gentleness and not out of anger or out of a desire to put our own wants first we are an example to the world around us.

Paul gives us 4 important characteristics that each of us are called to learn to help us in our efforts to be a unified as a community of faith. We are called to have humility, gentleness, patience and to bear with one another in love. Think back again to our puzzle if we take a piece of the puzzle and try to force it in a place where it shouldn't go it messes up the whole look and feeling of the puzzle, it just simply doesn't work. In many respects as people when we come to the table in a discussion if we constantly force our opinion, our ideas on others without listening and learning we can cause dissension and disagreements. And yet if we learn these 4 characteristics we can learn how to be a unified body of believers serving Christ. Humility is an attitude and gentleness is the action derived from it. Humble people recognize their gifts and talents but they don't lord them over others; they recognize how and when they can offer their gifts to others and they do so with gentleness and love. Gentle people do not attempt to grab for positions of importance or assert authority over others simply to be heard. This is difficult for us in our culture today because we think of humble and gentle people as poor, lacking in

prestige and insignificant. We think that people who are humble or gentle are weak and yet for God it is just the opposite; those who would put their own desires aside, those who would seek to serve the other, to lift up the other, to help another are people who are living out Christ's calling. Gentle and humble people are considerate of others, they don't let people trample all over them for the sake of being trampled on; rather they are willing to come to the table to listen, to be in conversation with out agenda and with a willingness to put aside differences so that the whole can be glorified and their individual self. The next trait is patience and for many of us we don't like this word. We live in an instant gratification culture, we like our information and our decisions made instantly and quickly and we don't like to wait. And yet patience is more than just getting things quickly. Patience in the Greek actually is translated as long suffering, for it is only through our sufferings, through our trials and tribulations that we really actually learn patience. Patience conveys the quality of being able to handle one another's faults and failures and refusing to avenge wrongs or perceived wrongs against us because we have understood through our own long suffering the grace that has been given to us. Bearing with one another in love is the action side of patience; bearing with one another in love emphasizes our willingness to forgive and involves empathizing with another person. Bearing with one another in love means that we learn how to listen, to forgive, we don't point out faults of another because we know the faults in our own hearts. Bearing with one another means that we are quick to pray for another and not condemn another; we hold each other accountable but we don't condemn another because we know in our own hearts that we are all deserving of Christ's judgment. These traits are all traits that Paul wants us to begin to cultivate both as individuals and as the community of faith. And yet we can't cultivate these on our own. Like the puzzle it doesn't magically get done by itself it needs an outside source to help it come together. We then need the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and in our lives to help us grow more mature in our faith and in our abilities to have humbleness, gentleness, patience and to bear with one another in love. We can not experience unity without the presence of the Holy Spirit and we can not maintain our unity without allowing the spirit to work in our lives.

When we focus on following the Lord and fulfilling his purposes for us, when we use the gifts we have been given with humility, gentleness, patience and love; when we desire to see the good for the community of faith above our own individual desires; when we seek to follow Christ first and foremost and then seek to follow his teachings amongst each other then we unified in our faith and witness to the world around us. However when we focus on ourselves and pursue our own agendas; ignore the voice of the other; when we allow anger and frustration to cloud our judgment; when we forget who it is that we are serving then we are like a puzzle where the pieces are forced into places they don't belong and the picture is lost; we become lost without direction or hope and we fail to live out our calling as Christians.

For Paul we are joined together by our come faith, our common belief and as such we are called to live together in unity of heart, mind and spirit because of all that Christ has done for us. We are told to put away our old way of being, our way before we became believers and to clothe ourselves with righteousness and holiness. We are called to do that individually and corporately. When we seek the holy and right things of God when we are living as the body of Christ, united in his grace and mercy and love we are a

shining example of God's grace to his world. This is a tough challenge for us. We can't do it alone, we need the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our community to continually change us, to continually challenge us and to continually remind us of how we are to live out our faith. What ways do you need to change today? How have you been forcing your ideas and beliefs on another? What areas of your heart do you need to be softened that you might be an example of Christ's love today?