

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 4:7-16

Part 1

Intro: I hope you all are enjoying the reading of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus each week as we work our way through these very, very important chapters. The Apostle Paul was raised up by the Lord to make known a secret which had been a part of the plan of God from eternity past, before there was any creation, before there was a single angel or a single human being.

That secret was not the Gospel. From the earliest pages of the Bible we begin to see man's greatest need, and what God intended to do to meet that need. Man's greatest need had to do with the fact that he was a sinner, and under the judgment of God. From the mention of "the seed of the woman" to God's provision of the skin of an animal to cover the physical nakedness of Adam and Eve, we have both prophecies and types of the coming sacrifice of the Son of God by which sin would be forgiven and a right relationship with God would be established. It would not be the result of what man would do for God, but of what God would do for man. The Gospel of the grace of God is older than the Bible, but it is seen from Genesis to Revelation as the only remedy for man's sin. It was Christ and the Gospel that God had in mind when He promised Abraham that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. God meant that by the Gospel all nations would be blessed with salvation. He did not mean that everybody would eventually be saved, but that throughout all time the only way of salvation from sin for anyone would be through faith in the Redeemer, whom we know now as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. No, the secret which was made known through Paul was not the Gospel. Through Paul and the other writers of the NT the Gospel has been explained in greater detail, but there has never been but one Gospel, and there never will be another. There is no need for another.

So the Gospel is not the secret. Abraham rejoiced to know that God was providing a Savior, and Abraham's Savior is the same as Paul's Savior, and the same as your Savior and mine if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life.

No the secret that God did not reveal until after the life on earth, the death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, was that there would be a new work among those who were saved in which both Jews and

Gentiles would be joined together in what is called “the church, which is His body,” that is, the body of Christ. And using that figure of a body, a living organism, Jesus Christ is the Head, and those who have been saved since Pentecost in Acts 2 are members of His body. Paul not only wrote about this body, the Church, in Ephesians, but also in Romans, in 1 Corinthians, in Colossians, but you will find this truth elsewhere in the NT. While the Lord was in the midst of His ministry on earth, He promised that He would build His Church. See Matthew 16:18. And this is what Paul had reference to here in **Ephesians, chapter 3, and verses 1 through 6.** (Read.)

This revelation from God was so new and so unbelievable that twice in the first three chapters, Paul recorded how he was praying that those who were saved in Ephesus, who were predominantly Gentiles, would be able to understand and live in the light of this glorious truth. In chapters 1, 2, and 3, as you have heard from Pastor Will, Dr. John, and me, Paul was speaking of the wealth that we as Christians enjoy in Christ. For those of you who are visiting with us this morning, we have just finished the study of Ephesians in our Sunday School classes, and I am following along at a slower pace in our Sunday morning services.

But now, having seen in the first three chapters, at least something of the wealth that we have in Christ, in chapter 4, 5, and down as far as the ninth verse of chapter 6, Paul has told us how we as members of the body of Christ as to live. Only the word he used to describe our lives, is the word, *walk*. But, to begin, he did not emphasize *what* we were to do, but *how* we are to live, or walk.

The point that Paul was making here at the beginning of the practical section of this epistle, was, that we have no reason to boast, or to feel that we are better than others who do not know the Lord Jesus as their Savior, but that it should humble us as we consider what God has done for us. After all, being saved was not our idea, nor was it Paul’s idea. All of us who are saved, are saved, because God has called us and made us a part of the body of Christ. And so you can see as you read verse 2 that Paul used the words, *lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*. And the reason for living this way, as he went on to say in verse 3 is because we all need to be constantly working hard “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, had a lot to say by way of condemning

pride. In Proverbs 11:2 we read, “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.” In Proverbs 13:10, “Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.” A more familiar verse on pride is Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Pride is one of the most obvious and most common of all of our sins. It is the source of most of our trouble. It is only as we practice humility that we are going to see the blessing of the Lord, and it is the only way that we can be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We don’t make peace with each other, or with God, but we are responsible to keep it, and to avoid every form of pride which can rise up in our hearts and affect our walk with God and with each other. Back in Ephesians 2:14-16 speaking of the relationship that we Jews and Gentiles have in the body of Christ, Paul said, speaking of Christ,

14 For He is our peace, Who hath made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contain in ordinances; for to make in Himself one new man, so making peace;

16 And that He might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) in one body by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:14-16).

We are responsible before God “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” How often this has been forgotten throughout the history of the Church!

And then, for our encouragement, Paul listed in verses 4 through 6 the sevenfold foundation of our unity, our oneness, in the Church:

- 1) “There is one body,
- 2) “And one Spirit,” the Holy Spirit.
- 3) “Even as ye are called in one hope of His calling.”
- 4) “One Lord”— the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5) “One faith,” probably a reference to our one Bible, the Word of God.
- 6) “One baptism,” the baptism of the Holy Spirit. See 1 Cor. 12:13.
- 7) “One God and Father of all,” meaning of all who believe. This makes us all members of the family of God.

“Two or more” would not fit into any of those statements. It is all “one.” What you have, I have; what I have, you have. And we all have all of these.

But with all of these blessings, the Lord has given us a tremendous assignment, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “Endeavoring” speaks of the effort which we need to put forth to do this. It speaks of work, hard work! The form of the verb that Paul used indicates also that it is constant work. It would be difficult to suggest an expression that Paul could have used which would emphasize how tremendously important it is to maintain unity with each other and with God in the body of Christ. But along with everything else that can be said about “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit,” there is one more thing that I must say. *It is an impossible assignment. Neither the Apostle Paul nor anyone else after him, including all of us, is equal to this task.* But then, isn’t everything that the Lord tells us to do, impossible? Have you found anything about the commandments of the Lord to be easy? Have you failed the Lord in any way this past week? Is there anyone here today who should be given an A+ for the Christian life this past week? What prospect do you and I have that next week will be any different?

This is where verse 7 should be a great encouragement to all of us. What does it tell us? Let me read it to you:

7 But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

“To every one of us” – That means that not a single one of us who knows the Lord is excluded. The strongest among us and the weakest among us – we are all included. What about us? “Is grace given.” You and I by nature don’t have the wisdom to ask for this grace, and so the Lord tells us here through the Apostle Paul, that it is given to us, not just in one lump sum, but as we need it, a continuing supply. But how full is this grace? It is “according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” Now this can be either the gift that Christ gives, or it can be that Christ is the gift. But taken either way, it amounts to about the same. Let me ask this question, When God gave us Christ, how much of Christ did He give us? You all should be able to tell me that He gave us all of Christ. He held nothing back. When Christ, or God, gives us grace, how much grace does He give us?

When Peter was concluding his first epistle, this is how he prayed for God’s blessing upon the believers to whom he was writing:

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen
(1 Peter 5:10-11).

God is not just a God of little grace, but “of all grace!” Paul in our text was speaking of enabling grace, the grace that led him to write to the Philippian believers, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). The grace that led him to write to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 15:10,

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

In 2 Corinthians the Apostle Paul spoke of a special revelation that was given to him when he was caught up into the third heaven, the very dwelling place of God, where he saw things that he was not permitted to pass on to others. But then, referring to that experience, he said this which you will find in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul was a grace man. And that is what you and I should be. Paul could and did write to the Ephesians telling them that they were to endeavor (with all that that word means) “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and he told them to do that knowing full well that they couldn’t do it regardless of how hard they might try. But he also knew that by the grace that is continuously given to us “according to the measure of Christ,” they could and would do all that God has commanded them to do. The Lord Jesus told His disciples shortly before He went to the Cross, “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Oh, how hard it is for us to learn that simple truth, and to set along side of it, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

But before I close I want you to see with me what it cost the Lord to make such grace available to us.

Yesterday morning as I spoke briefly to the men who had come to pray, I mentioned to them a truth that had been pointed out by the Puritan, Thomas Brooks, in his book on prayer, called, *The Secret Key to Heaven*. He said that the privilege we often take for granted of going to the Lord in the Holy of holies, is a privilege that was purchased for us by the blood of Jesus. I want you to see the same thing this morning about the grace of God upon which we are so dependent every day that we live. And you will see this in verses 8, 9, and 10 of our chapter, Ephesians 4.

Let me call your attention to the word, “wherefore,” at the beginning of verse 8, which means that Paul was going to tell us the price that our Lord Jesus Christ paid in order that we might have an unending supply of the grace of God upon which we can continually draw. And what it cost the Lord was predicted in the words which Paul quoted here from Psalm 68:18. It speaks of the culmination of our Lord’s work on earth when He ascended back into heaven, leading captivity captive, and then giving gifts to men, such as the grace Paul had been writing about and the grace that is available to us on a day by day continuing basis. Leading captivity captive, speaks of the victory that our Lord won as a result of His death and resurrection. The Lord is pictured here as a mighty Conqueror, having by His death conquered the Devil, and all of the forces of evil, sin, and the last enemy which is to be destroyed, which is death. This opened the way for the bestowal of the gift of salvation and all of the accompanying gifts, some of which the Apostle was about to discuss. So we see the triumphant victory of our Lord first “when He ascended up on high.”

But what preceded this?

Verse 9 tells us that He could not have ascended if He had not first descended into the lower parts of the earth. This too speaks of the depths of the humiliation and degradation which our Lord suffered. This included how He humbled Himself first, by coming to earth as a Man, born of the virgin Mary, then His sufferings as a Man on earth, His arrest, the mock trial with its false witnesses, His humiliating death by crucifixion as the worst of criminals, and finally his burial. This was “the lower parts of the earth.”

But verse 10 returns us again to His exaltation. The very same Jesus Who

had descended, was the One Who ascended far above all heavens, “that. He might fill all things.” It probably is impossible for anyone to explain fully what these words mean, but they surely meant that the presence of our Lord would be felt as never before throughout all creation, but in line with our text it meant that our Lord’s grace, His enabling grace, would be available in an unending supply to meet the needs of. His people whom. He is now preparing for glory.

Concl: Can we see in a better way now that this grace which flows so continuously and fully from God and Christ by the Holy Spirit to us, was purchased at the infinite price of the incarnation, suffering, death, and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s grace for salvation and for our daily walk comes to us free of charge, but at the cost of the precious blood of Christ whose worth is beyond all calculation. How thankful we should be for the death of our Savior or it could never have been written that God’s grace is sufficient for us. Let us thank Him now.