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# The Spiritual Provision for Biblical Ministry

## Ephesians 4:1-10

*Pastor Russ Kennedy*

All the different “looks” of ministry today...

Traditional...

Ethnic Cultural...

Dated Contemporary...

On the Edge...

Leads to an interesting question... in all these “styles” what constitutes a truly Biblical ministry?

In this day when ministry is measured and evaluated by all sorts of human measures and standards, we need to return once again to carefully setting Biblical standards for ourselves. Part of that is what we find here in Ephesians 4:1-16. Today we will be looking at a portion of this text from a general view.

In the book, Paul has been talking about our Christian identity. He has been telling us who God has said we are. There are both corporate, who we are together, and individual, who we are as persons, aspects. There have been two important prayers: one that we might know and one that we might be strengthened. Paul is now beginning to work how we become who we are. Since the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ, are at the core of who we are, then he is going to intertwine those truths with the commands he is about to give. He is not going to let us move on from what He has done (the gospel) and who we are (our identity). Through the rest of the book Paul is going to set the trajectory for becoming who we are along the path of God’s grace and commands.

The flow of Paul’s writing is a transition from the prayers for spiritual perception and spiritual power to serving in the church...

What is the primary objective of a grace enabled and Biblical ministry? What is it we are trying to accomplish?

There are two enormous challenges that face a church doing ministry.

The challenge of maintaining the unity that we have. How do we sustain the union and unity God has already created? If we create the unity, it will be fake, foolish, and substandard. What should we avoid that undermines, attacks, or corrupts the unity we have? Remember, it cannot be destroyed, but it can be harmed and corrupted.

The challenge of cultivating diversity needed for effective ministry. How do we accept, affirm and even acclaim Biblical diversity in ministry? Now notice I said “Biblical”. Diversity is an effect not an aim. As soon as it becomes a primary aim then we will be deeply tempted to compromise – diversity can be a good desire and a deadly master.

So here are two things that often end up in competition and sometimes even conflict. Yet, they answer the following question: *What are two foundational elements of a God-honoring ministry?*

## Unity - To Be Humbly Maintained (v.1-6)

The unity of the true church is to be highly prized.

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner 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> eager 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 that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

### *Its Costly Price (v.1)*

Ah the deep reminder of the cost of ministry. Paul, a prisoner... Paul, the Lord's prisoner...

Paul again reminds us that he is imprisoned by the Roman government. The commitment to gospel and Biblical ministry has cost him his freedom.

But Paul also reminds us that he is the prisoner of the Lord. The commitment to gospel and Biblical ministry has cost him everything while promising him everything.

Think about some implications:

Who we are in Christ, does not lead to spiritual triumphalism. Our place, position and privileges in Christ often lead us into hardship and suffering. This is not what we want to hear. But it is nevertheless the truth.

Some servants of God will go through great danger and difficulty while others do not. The cost of discipleship will be different for different people. But there will always be a cost. What is it costing you to follow Christ? If there is no cross to take up in your own following of Jesus, then you need to carefully weigh what discipleship actually means to you.

If you are the Lord's servant, the Lord's slave, His prisoner, what does that mean? Are you poised to take down all other ruling thrones in your life and bow with glad joy to the Lord? In what sphere of your life does the Lord have little say?

There is also a sense of pathos in this. This older, well-worn, much-traveled, often suffering servant of Christ speaks to our hearts. How can we think, want and act in ways that harm our unity and lessen our diversity? Are we not all supposed to be servants of Jesus, prisoners of our Lord?

### *Its Overarching Plea (v.1)*

These brief words are the overarching command that frames the whole of chapters 4-5. This is how we are to live given who we are. This is how we to live, given what God has called us to become. And these words point to what immediately follows.

Godliness in a believer is not merely a matter of ethics. It is not merely about following steps of action to avoid sin and practice righteousness. It is the way we think and live that is worthy of the kind of God who has called or summoned us into His kingdom and family.

We must live a life that is worthy, that measures up to our being called to salvation. We have been sovereignly summoned into submission to God. It is a high calling. It is a Divine summons. So, please, live in a way that measures up this calling.

### ***Its Required Practices (v.2-3)***

...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Unity is to be diligently maintained by having a right view of ourselves and valuing the unity in the Spirit. Christians are maintaining unity, not creating it. Our unity exists because of God's grace and saving work. It is a unity with all true believers that is to be maintained.

Maintaining the unity that God has created requires humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance in love. Everyone one of these virtues remind us that we are all in the process of growth and change. No one has arrived. We are all still learning to live out the gospel through grace.

Look at the words very carefully: with these things, respond to others this way.

With humility, gentleness, and patience... Humility is having a proper view of ourselves in relation to God and in relation to others. It is the opposite of pride. I do not see myself as the god of my world who must be in control and who is always right. Humbleness begets gentleness. We respond to others who are different than us and who differ with us with calm kindness. Humility and a calm kindness with others is persistent. It is patient. It is willing to wait for God to deal with the issues. It does not try to usurp God's power through pride, power and demands for immediate agreement.

This attitude of heart then poises us to bear with one another. Bearing with one another recognizes that God is at work in our relationships for our good. I am willing, with humbleness, gentleness and patience for God to do His work. That work may be in me. That work may be in others. But the unity and diversity of the church is more important than my being acknowledged as being right.

We are to have an eagerness to live in harmony with other Christians. Through the peace that ties, do your best to maintain unity in the Spirit. The primary focus of this is that we live in harmony and peace among ourselves. The church at Ephesus, as did many churches of the first generation, struggled with the division between Jew and Gentile. So Paul is calling on them to recognize the work that God has done and the essential oneness of God's people. It is a call to living at peace eagerly seeking to overcome natural divides whatever they may be.

### ***Its Theological Principles (v.4-6)***

The unity that is maintained relationally is based on the objective realities of truth.

#### **The Unity of the Spirit**

We have the unity of the Spirit - one body, hope and calling. It is the Spirit who has effectively called us to Christ. It is the Spirit who has joined us into one Body in Christ. It is the Spirit who assures us (hope) that we are God's, that all will be well and orients our hope towards earthly and heavenly realities.

## **The Unity of the Son**

We have the unity of the Son - one faith, baptism. It is Jesus who is at the center of our belief. Baptism is the outward response and ordinance that reflects our union with Christ. We are united with Christ and with the church through faith and the ordinance.

## **The Unity of the Father**

We have the unity of the Father - over, in and through all.

These individual roles are united at the level of essence in the Trinity. So the church is united at the level of being, of spiritual life. The diversities are external and relational and good.

## **Diversity - To Be Gratefully Embraced (v.7-10)**

- Paul turns from showing how our oneness is framed by these great truths to how our diversity is equipped and energized.

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Now, when we speak of diversity, we not referring to the modern concept of ethnic, social or theological diversity. The Bible speaks in other texts about our welcoming and receiving others who are different at the social, economic, cultural, ethnic level. But that is not what is in view in these two paragraphs...

### ***Its Foundational Principle (v.7)***

Each one of us receives enabling grace (gifts) measured out to us by Christ's giving.

All are enabled - every believer has some gift or grace or spiritual ability to serve the church. No one is exempt.

Our spiritual ability is a gift - it is given to us; we cannot earn it nor deserve it. It is a stewardship to be cultivated by grace.

It is measured out by Christ - it is Christ who decides who gets what. It is a sovereign bestowal to be received with gratitude.

### ***Its Scriptural Parallel (v.8)***

Paul uses the language of Psalm 68:18 to summarize the whole Psalm. That whole Psalm depicts a victorious ruler dispensing the gifts to His subjects. This paraphrase shows that it is the resurrected and ascended Lord who bestows these grace enablements to His people.

Notice also the kind of connection Paul makes: the reference to the Old Testament is a "therefore." What Christ has done as a great reality casts its shadow back into this Old Testament Psalm.

## ***Its Explanatory Parenthetical (v.9-10)***

What is meant by to the lower, earthly regions, literally, “into the lower parts of earth”? The genitive “of” can be taken in three ways: (1) “Into the lower parts, namely, the earth” (a genitive of apposition). This would refer to Christ’s incarnation, His “descent” to the earth. (2) “Into the parts lower than the earth” (a genitive of comparison). This would mean that Christ descended into Hades between His death and resurrection. (3) “Into the lower parts which belong to the earth” (a genitive of possession). This would refer to Christ’s death and His burial in the grave. The third view best fits the context because in His death Christ had victory over sin and redeemed those who would be given as “gifts” to the church.

Christ’s ascent above the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe probably refers to His regal relationship with the whole world, from which position He bestows gifts as He wills because of His work on the Cross. This fits well with 1:23, which speaks of Christ imparting all the fullness of His blessings to the church and to the universe. Christ, who embodies the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9), fills the universe and is Head over it (cf. Col. 1:18).<sup>i</sup> (Zuck/Walvord)

The giving of gifts to us on earth is just as real as His descent to earth and ascension to heaven. He came down and went up so that the Spirit and His gifts could come down to us.

So the differences and diversities of abilities and perspectives among us should not divide us but should allow us to be more together than we could ever be apart.

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## **Reflect and Respond**

Do you see yourself as a prisoner of the Lord? Who owns you? Who or what masters you? What is following Christ costing you?

How much do you value the unity of the Body of Christ? How much do you value the unity of the church?

As gently as I know how to ask, does this characterize you? “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”

Do you serve in the church? If not, why not?

Next week Pastor Jon will unpack the next paragraphs on the how the church ministers to one another with the gifts God has given all.

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<sup>i</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.