

# **A Philosophy of Ministry**

*Clearcreek Chapel Distinctives*

**Ephesians 4:1-16**

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## **Introduction**

Have you ever wondered how certain issues get entrenched into a particular political party's agenda? How somewhat small, individual items get raised to such importance? Sometimes indeed the little points get lost in the bigger picture. But ultimately, the bigger picture should drive the agenda and the details should be understood in the larger framework. In the workplace, things often play out in a similar fashion. Policies and procedures are developed that often meet resistance. Many times, that resistance occurs because either the policy makers or the policy followers have forgotten the reason or reasons the workplace exists (often just slightly beyond making more money for the workers, owners, or shareholders).

Well, if you haven't guessed, or even experienced it, churches have the same problems. Sometimes certain issues, practices, events, and policies get lost and detached from the bigger picture. Denominational traditions or even just long-standing ways of doing things can impact how people think about church. Conflicts from the past, either from this particular church or previous church experiences will cause people to react to things that are often not clearly understood. Very frequently the details become more "real" or important than the reason that they were created to start with.

It is important to frequently stop and ask some questions. Questions like: "How do things work around here?" And more importantly: "Why are things done that way?" These kinds of questions should drive us to remember to have a commitment to Biblical based answers and structures. I recall many years ago having a conversation with someone regarding the church planting project with which they were involved. We were discussing their proposed leadership structure. The plan was well thought out. It had good practical and cultural history. But as I pressed into how this was compatible with the various passages the Bible had about church leadership and organization, the push back became palpable. This person, who has a formal commitment to Biblical authority, almost made the statement that "the Bible didn't matter if it doesn't 'work'."

That is why we are involved in the current sermon series. It involves a reflection on the principles from the Scripture that should drive our practices. It presents a focus for each of us to affirm. If we understand and then commit to an underlying idea, then the practices that flow out of those ideas should allow us to work better together, to worship in greater harmony, and express the gospel in our lives more consistently as Clearcreek Chapel. Pastor Russ wrote this paragraph as the theme for the series. He wrote: "Each gathered church must do God's will. It must obey God in its corporate, community life. Most of the ministry that is done by a gathered church is in the realm of wisdom. It is tethered to the precepts, principles, patterns, and

practices of the New Testament church. Therefore, we affirm what we believe in these core areas as well as what how we workout God's will and wisdom in each area." Pastor Russ in the first installment of the series challenged us to remain faithful and committed to trusting the Bible and therefore preaching from both what the Bible says and how it says it, as the basis for all our decision making in the life of the church. Pastor John then challenged us as to what it means for Christ to be supreme and the center of our lives and practices and how this impacts our church culture at Clearcreek Chapel.

Our Scripture text for the morning is found in the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to the churches in the city of Ephesus. This letter has laid quite a bit of groundwork before we arrived at this chapter. It has pointed out our ultimate goals and direction. It has shown the possibility of this being true by our being connected to or "in Christ". The nature of our unity in this is given to us by grace through faith because we in ourselves are unworthy and unable. He plays this out for us, encouraging each congregation to live out those eschatological goals (the "not yet" perfections) in the messy "already" of this world. We will see in this passage in chapter four how Paul's reflections and instructions should impact our congregation as we strive to make real in our experience what is real in our new life. I am not going to examine every detail in the passage we will read this morning but will use it to move into application details for Clearcreek Chapel. We will see how this passage provides a strong philosophy of ministry, not just for the Ephesians but for all churches through the ages, including Clearcreek Chapel in 2022.

## **Call to Unity (vs 1-6)**

Turn to Ephesians 4 where we will look at verses 1-16. First let us notice in verses 1-6 a "call to unity." Let's read these verses together.

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord,  
urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,  
with all humility and gentleness,  
with patience,  
bearing with one another in love,  
eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.  
There is one body and one Spirit  
—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
one God and Father of all,  
who is over all and through all and in all.*

Paul at this point in the letter, based upon what he has already stated, now urges them to live in a way that exemplifies the reality that they share in the gospel. "Walk" is a common metaphor in the Bible for living. Walking involves activity and energy. It implies movement and change. It can involve a departure and a destination. It also is related to a particular path. This worthy walk is then described with two small, prepositional phrases pointing out the "manner" of this life.

### **Manner (1-2a)**

It involves an attitude that is both humble and patient. The first phrase in the text states: "with all humility and gentleness." When we recognize that we are unworthy and unable (go back and read chapter 2), our living should be characterized as humble and gentle. But since this life is with and among others who are fellow "called ones," it is complicated by relationships. Pride, anger, and impulsiveness are traits that are truly destructive to live in community. We are constantly influenced by a culture that says, just do it, have it your way, go for the gusto. And because we are in this community relationship is why he also points out it should be characterized by or "with patience" as we see in the second phrase. This means we are slow to anger or retaliation. In the OT this idea is often referred to as long-suffering. Getting the "one-up" on someone or simply "getting even" should not be the mindset of those expected to walk in congruence with their calling. It might even refer to the "eye-rolling" that we often do as well.

### **Means (2b-3)**

So not only is there "attitude" involved in this walk, but it has observable actions that demonstrate it. There are "means" to the walk. These next two phrases likely indicate the means or how this walk occurs. The first involves "bearing with one another in love." We are urged to make it evident that our humility, gentleness, and patience is characterizing our lives. If we genuinely love one another, then our enduring their weaknesses and failures, or bearing with their challenges and even faults will be visible.

And as the last phrase states, we should then be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." This is likely the key concept of this section. Notice the idea of "eager". We should make effort to maintain a unity that should already exist. This unity leads to true peace, not just a sense of "truce." One of the reasons I think this is key here is the follow-on section. Here is a more poetic, perhaps even a hymn that Paul is rehearsing for them. It then reaches back to earlier parts of the letter and points out the "motive" for this worthy walk.

### **Motive (4-6)**

I think this is important enough for us to reread this section together.

*There is one body and one Spirit  
—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
one God and Father of all,  
who is over all and through all and in all.*

This falls out into three stanzas. All of them are focused on our unity because of the repetition of the word "one." The first "stanza" gives us the substance of this motive for unity. There is

ultimately one body and one spirit. We are united to Christ and "in him" by the work of the same Holy Spirit. There are not multiple schemas that somehow arrive at God but in different ways. In fact, the second stanza reaffirms there is a singular access to this reality, it is through the work of Christ "as Lord", our faith in him, and our profession of the faith pictured in baptism (dying with him and raised to a new life). And the last stanza calls us together in worship, acknowledging God as the architect, purpose, and goal of all of life and reality. When this is reaffirmed in the life of a church, all else should seem petty and inconsequential.

At Clearcreek Chapel we want to continually call us to unity in gospel, Christ-centered lives and worship. Sometimes it feels like the details are not spelled out as completely as perhaps we would like, but we should always be committed to understanding the Word of God, to govern our walks in relationships with one another that are characterized by humility and love, recognizing that all of us are gathered into Him because of God's love, mercy, and plan.

### **Context for Maturity (7-16)**

In fact, the passage then goes on to show more of how God is working out this relational unity in the middle of people who are still influenced by pride, impatience, and division. We are challenged to see growth and maturity as the process we are involved in at this time in redemptive history and Paul spells out this context for maturity.

#### **Grace (7-10)**

Let's again read together, this time verses 7 through 10.

*But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

*Therefore it says,*

*"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."*

*(In saying, "He ascended,"*

*what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?*

*He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens,*

*that he might fill all things.)*

Paul uses a Scripture from the 68th Psalm to remind us that God is working in us and through us, not because of our individual abilities and talents. Remember earlier in the letter Paul tells us that from a spiritual perspective, we were dead until God's grace and gifting occurred. The one who came from heaven and worked out the gospel for us and then ascended back to heaven sent us the Spirit to complete the current plan of the gospel's intent in the world and in us. Christ indeed is gifting us through that grace that made us alive and placed us in Him.

#### **Gift (11, 12)**

Paul goes on to show one way this is exemplified in the life of believers in the context of our relationship and community. Again, let's read together, this time just verses 10 and 11.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,  
to equip the saints for the work of ministry,  
for building up the body of Christ,*

Notice that in this context of a unity of relationships, the gift he highlights is a gift of other people. "He gave" is emphatic, connecting this to the passage quoted earlier, setting the tone the those gifted are gifted from Christ himself and because of his work. These kinds of people (try not to read these words as "offices" or titles, they may become that, but hear them as groups of people first) are present in our lives as a gift to each of us. And this gifting is for the express purpose of equipping us to be enabled for the work of the ministry, of carrying out God's plan and purposes. There are some who see the "to equip" and the "for the work" as parallel ideas. It seems best to read them as sequential, the "for " indicates the reason for the equipping. Saints, those called and changed, are to engage in service under God and for each other. They are equipped for this service/ministry by those gifted to them. And the "saints" should perceive them as gifts to them rather than obstacles, barriers, or haranguers. And the ministry will in effect build up the others in the body. This building should probably be thought of primarily as qualitative but does not exclude quantitative. That means we will mature and grow in Christlikeness, but we will also likely add believers to this relationship.

### **Goal (13-16)**

And he then elaborates on this goal we have been alluding to. In fact, the reason that "building up" is likely qualitative is because of what Paul goes on to say. What exactly does a "built up body of Christ" look like? Reading together again, now from verse 13 to 16.

*until we all attain  
to the unity of the faith  
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,  
to mature manhood,  
to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,*

*so that we may  
no longer be children,  
tossed to and fro by the waves  
and carried about  
by every wind of doctrine,  
by human cunning,  
by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

*Rather, speaking the truth in love,  
we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,  
from whom the whole body,  
joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped,  
when each part is working properly,  
makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

There are two things I want to highlight from this. First, it involves "everyone." It is "until we all attain." So, the next "we" should be seen the same way, none of us should remain "spiritually infants" and easily confused by the world and Satan. "We" (again think we all) are to "grow up" so that the whole body (again the metaphor should lead us to think everyone) works, or to go back to our original metaphor, walks properly or worthily. This passage is another reason to interpret "to equip... for" in the way we did.

But it also involves "every way." We don't just give up some of our attitudes, actions, or activities, but all should be focused on the growth, maturation, building up, walk, work, life of each other, thinking of others rather than ourselves. Our work ethic, our marriage relationships, our parenting, our reading and thinking, our speech and conversation, all should be turned toward Christ (hence Pastor John's sermon last week). The text focuses on the same unity that began the passage and reaffirms this unity is based on a relationship, a "knowledge" of the Son of God (sounds Christ centered, doesn't it?). A stability in life that looks to one another should flow out of this, and indeed that is the "why" of ministry that Paul points out.

## **Clarification in Ministry**

### **Belonging**

How does this text operate in establishing the basis of what and how we do things at Clearcreek Chapel?" How does understanding and applying this text create a "philosophy of ministry?" First of all, we affirm the concept of belonging. We belong to one another because we belong to an eschatological reality. We affirm that we are members together. But just how are we identified as members to pursue service and unity?

First is that of belief. We must be "gospel" people. People who believe and embrace what Christ has done for us and recognize we are called, made alive and empowered by God himself through the Holy Spirit. We live in faith that we eagerly and readily profess. It is not because we have a certain family history or personal religious upbringing. We must embrace the cross and the Christ of the cross for our life.

In fact, that profession is made public in that symbol known as baptism. In the first century this was more clearly a profound demonstration of one's faith commitment. It is intended still to be a public proclamation of one's commitment to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is a great visual symbol of that reality that should motivate the one baptized and those witnessing the baptism to walk "worthy" of that great and glorious calling and work that God has done in us and for us.

And then, we should be clear that we belong. This is a modern concern. It would have been clear in the early years, but now, because many people claim a "Christian" background or even "spiritual experience", the identification with what we understand as belief should not be assumed. People move from congregation to congregation, sometimes from radically different

understandings of the gospel and faith. We ask and expect that those who wish to serve in our unity and community intentionally do so. At baptism, we affirm that the faith you profess is credible, if you come from elsewhere, we wish to confirm and encourage that faith.

### **Benefit**

But this text also points out another concept that informs our philosophy of ministry is that what we do should be "for one another." We serve one other with specific goals in mind. We want "everyone of us" to grow in "everyway", moving forward in stability. We want all to be able to live and serve together in unity and peace, humbly, gentle and patient with each other. The specific things we do are not merely to do something or to have a "program" but to accomplish the purpose of growing together.

This service in the context of community. We should do things together, not driven by my own ideas or "needs" but out of what and how we do things here, together. And it should be about one another. What is it that "they" need"? This is rather than what do "I" need. We should be pursuing maturity and stability that drives a unity, not only in our own lives but with intentionality in the lives of others

### **Blessing**

And we recognize that we only accomplish any of this because of God's gifting. We are each "blessed" differently so that we may serve in different roles. Some teach, some organize, but we all participate. We must constantly remind ourselves that it is through the Spirit we do anything and must rely on being empowered by God. And this is fueled through our prayer which exhibits our conscious need on his work and blessing. This keeps our dependence on him to the forefront. We encapsulated this in our ministry vision. Can we read this together as well?

*By God's grace and through His Word,  
we will cultivate in the hearts of God's people  
a passion for the supremacy of our Lord, Jesus Christ  
magnified in love for Him,  
manifested in love for one another  
and multiplied by love for the lost.*

### **Summary**

So, let's make this a very simple summary. Ask yourself, "Where do I fit in?" Are you characterized by avoidance, rebellion or even fear? Are you eager, making effort to build unity, to be engaged in service like we see it here at Clearcreek Chapel? Are you even embracing the gospel or understand what that means?

Think carefully about how your answers align with the message of the text from Paul to the Ephesians, that is from God to you!