

The Chapel Ministry



CLEARCREEK
CHAPEL

Developing A Biblical Ministry

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*S*avoring the *S*upremacy of *G*od
*S*tudying the *W*ord of *G*od
*S*haping the *P*eople of *G*od
*S*preaching the *G*ospel of *G*od

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Introduction

The Chapel is approaching 15 years of ministry. Through these years, we have gone through many phases and growing pains. There has emerged here, by God's grace, a ministry focused on magnifying God through worship, spiritual maturity and outreach. Who we are and what we are becoming in the practical fleshing out of ministry is becoming more clearly defined and more strategically aimed at and planned for.

This morning we begin a brief, three sermon series on *Developing A Biblical Ministry* from Ephesians 3:14 – 4:16. Again, this is not meant to be a comprehensive philosophy or development of ministry with the Word in our culture. Rather, it is aimed to bring this single block of important paragraphs to focus as we meditate and pray over our Mission, Vision and Strategies. Peter felt that it was important to go back to foundational truths for it was profitable for the hearers. So much of what I say will not be new – but my prayer is that it will all be true.

May God grant that we will come to know Jesus Christ more fully and thus be more conformed to Him and His character as a gathered church here at the Chapel.

The Roots of a Biblical Ministry

Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

☒ A Biblical Ministry is rooted in the growing comprehension of who Christ is and what He has done. Paul's long reflection on the glories of God's saving grace through Christ in Chapters 1-3 brings us to this prayer. Jesus Christ has wrought our salvation personally (2:1-10) and corporately (2:11-22) according a His redemptive historical purpose designed to magnificently put His glory on display (3:1-13).

☒ That brings us then to prayer that:

- Serves as A *TRANSITION* from doctrine in Chapters 1-3 to the Duty in Chapters 4-6. It reminds us that the aim of doctrine is both doxology and duty fueled by a delight in the God we know. Thus prayer is the living connection, not only between us and God, but between the truths the love and the holiness and ministry we pursue.
- Establishes A *CONNECTION* between the Corporate Unity in 3:11-22 and the Corporate Ministry in 4:1-16. This prayer connects our essential, redemptive, corporate, heavenly unity in God's Kingdom, His Body and His Building with the practical functioning and fleshing out of our life and ministry together.
- Identifies A *RELATION* between what God has done in Christ and what He is doing in Christians. It shows us that living and ministering is Christians ought to be the natural outgrowth of who we are as Christians. God has done a final and complete work in Christ that is being worked out through us.

Therefore we are deeply challenged to think about ministry and Christian living in a uniquely Christ-centered way. The effect is a way of ministry and life that is different from all other religions, myths and philosophies of life. Why? Because all that we do is shaped, not just by principles and patterns, but finally and fully by a Person.

Bowing - Our Response to God

(v.14-15)

We are here at this paragraph without having come through the rest of the book that has gone before. So the *therefore* that begins this sentence is a megaphone broadcasting back to all that has gone before. The riches of God in His grace (1:7), glory (1:18) and mercy (2:4) cause Paul to fall down in awe and adoration. He is bowing His knees, not because He is praying, but because this is the proper position before God.

So a Biblical ministry is rooted in *our position before God*.

Humility – Lowliness before our God

(v.14)

The New Living Translation renders these opening words like this, "When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father..." This captures the sense of it. Paul is prostrate before God because He has contemplated in his mind the amazing person and work of God. He has been deeply moved in His affections. And His will bends His knees in humble awe before such a God in response to the great wisdom and eternal purposes of God demonstrated in what He has planned and executed in the Church.

We need this word today. We have become so besotted with ourselves that we can read Ephesians 1-3 and exclaim, "What an amazing work this is that God would go to such lengths to show the worth and value of man." In other words, we are so full of ourselves that we think that we are the grand object of all this. And that is manifestly not so. Look just at Ephesians 3:8-11. God's grace enabled Paul to preach the gospel and to bring to light God's redemptive-historical plan with this purpose, "so that the manifold (multifaceted) wisdom of God might now be made know THROUGH the church TO the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies..." In other words, the church is the lens through which God delights to put His glory on display.

This ought to call forth from us awestruck humility before our God. It ought to demolish our pride and demote our self-centeredness. Does our understanding of God cast us down on our knees. My beloved, it is there that ministry best begins.

Honor – Recognition of our God

(v.15)

It is from the position of humility and lowliness that we can best lift up and honor God. Paul is bowing His knees to his Father. In our culture, we tend to think of this as a term of endearment. If we do that, we are going to miss the point here. A father in Biblical days was viewed as one to whom honor was given as one whose experience of life made him mature, wise and authoritative. So Paul is not bowing before His "daddy" or "papa", but before his Father.

The honor is that God is the origin and source of all that we think of in true, honorable Fatherhood. It is not that we have fathers, and then God tells us to think of him as just the best of fathers. Rather, He truly is a father and our thought about fathers is derived from that.

This brings in verse 15 to a short phrase that has spilled an enormous amount of ink across the commentaries. Should the rendering be, "from whom every family" or "from whom the whole family"? Without boring you with all the options, possibilities and arguments one way or another, I think that this should be "from whom the whole family." This fits best with the emphasis in the larger context on the unity of the church, is drawn rather neatly from Ch 2:19, sustains the Father, sons, adopted motif and brings it all together. The whole inclusive family and lineage and household of God derives its familial name and heritage from our Father, our God. So the family in heaven and earth refers to all the saints, whether alive or dead (Hebrews 12:23).

So a Biblical ministry is rooted in our response to God as we humble ourselves and honor our Father God.

Asking - Our Requests from God (v.16-29)

The ministry is not only rooted in our *position before God* but also in our *provision from God*. Paul turns to what it is that he requests from the Father concerning the whole family. Here are his petitions.

- Ministry is rooted in the kind of praying that *acknowledges* our utter dependence on God. How and how much we pray over our ministry together is a real measure of whether we are depending on God or our selves.
- Ministry is rooted in the kind of praying that *affirms* the worth of the glory of God. It is a grant out of or according to, in proportion to the riches of God's glory. Do we pray over our ministry together in such a way that shows how much we value the worth of God's being magnified?
- Ministry is rooted in the kind of praying that *asks* along the axis of God's purposes. I am becoming more and more convinced that we are ignoring the model of New Testament praying in regards to people and ministry. It is rather safe to say that even here at the Chapel, not a majority of you are praying these prayers.
- Ministry is rooted in the kind of praying that *aims* at expectations defined by God's Word. We pray for these Biblical things expecting these Biblical results.

So if this is so, what then do we pray for as Paul does?

Power - The Enabling of God's Spirit (v.16-17a)

We pray that, as the NLT has it, "from his glorious, unlimited resources He will give you mighty inner strength through His Holy Spirit." *Here is ministry that depends utterly on God's power.*

Think about the *CHARACTERISTICS* of this enabling.

- It is a grant, a gift from God. It is an aspect of His grace that gives strength. It is not that God owes us or that we can even compel it from God. We ask in humble lowliness for this bequest.
- It is out of the wealth of His glory. God's power to us comes out of or in proportion to the immeasurable riches of His glory. This accords with the connection Paul has made earlier in Chapter 1 between God's grace and God's glory, so much so that it becomes God's glorious grace. Why is it not "out of God's omnipotence" rather than glory? Because it is not sheer power that God imparts. When God enables there is something distinctly glorious about it that magnifies God.
- It is that we might be strengthened with power in the inner man. Do you ever think of your inner man as languishing in weakness without the gracious power of God? Do you think of your inner man, your soul, much at all? We so focus on the needs of the outer that we give little time and attention to the needs of the inner. What if you spent just as much time in reading the Word (feeding the soul) as you did eating meals and snacks? What if the ratio between your exercise and your eating was the same as your ministry and your devotions? I believe that we today have churches full of small souled people.
- It is mighty inner strength by the Holy Spirit. I wonder if in our rejection of Charismatic errors, we have come to dismiss the Holy Spirit as unnecessary and incidental in our lives. Now this is not that we begin to focus on the Spirit so that we can have direct experiences of Him. Rather, it is that we recognize the Biblical truths of the person and work of the Spirit in our lives and realize that the Holy Spirit delights to spotlight Christ. I will go so far as to say, whatever genuine experience you have of Christ in your life is the work of the Spirit.

Notice though the *CAUSE* of this enabling. It is aimed at making Christ at home in our hearts through faith. Now notice carefully: it is not that Christ might come to dwell as though salvation is meant. Rather, the word means to settle down, to be at home. After a long vacation, it is the satisfying rest of being at home. Listen to it this way, "May Christ be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust Him." There it is. The aim of the mighty inner strength of God's Spirit in you is that you will trust in Christ. So, do you?

Some translations pick up on a dependency here to the next request. We need to be strong in trusting Christ so that we can fully experience the love of God.

Perception - The Comprehending of God's Love(v.17b-19)

We pray that we may have the power to understand, yes even to truly grasp the immeasurable and unfathomable dimensions of God's love. *Here is ministry that delights utterly in God's love.*

Do you see this? We must have the inner strength of God through His Spirit so that we have power to understand what is actually utterly beyond us. The prayer is for us to be able to see with the eyes of our souls, to know, to grasp, to comprehend.

Notice the *CHARACTERISTICS* of this perceiving.

- It is an understanding of our roots and foundations. Being rooted and grounded in love is the premise on which it is built. The roots of our relationship with God go down deep in His love. The foundations of our salvation by God sit on the bedrock of His love. So I pray that you will run your roots down deep and draw fully from the resources that come from God's inexhaustible love
- It is a knowing that is genuine and authentic, truly comprehending the magnificent object of its gaze. Hear me beloved. This is the great temptation to all of us, and particularly to those of us who deal with the Word of God and ministry as a vocation. The danger to us is that just because we know what the spiritual truth is, that we can describe it and even in some sense feel it we have truly had an experience of it. This is a kind of knowing that impacts our affections and our wills. Thus it is an *experience* of God's love.
- It is a corporate, together experience. This was the great insight for me. We are not pursuing merely an individual, personal and private experience of God's love. Rather, "together with all God's people (saints)" we are able to grasp in a real way the unfathomable love of God. Why? Because we are so one in Christ that God intends to disclose His surpassingly great love to us together.
- It is a beyond measure and surpasses knowledge kind of love. You see, here is someone who has tasted and experienced this love. How do we know that? Look at his struggle to express it. Have we become so rational that we are put off by this kind of wondering exuberance. Beloved, let us together, pray for and pursue after knowing and comprehending the love of God this way.

Notice the *CAUSE* of this perception of God's love. The contemplation of the love of God in Christ brings about a transformation in the life of the Christian. There is a transforming power in beholding Christ. There are no steps of action here, no do this then that. I cannot

send you home with measurable homework. But I can say to you who are sniffing the sweet aroma of love of God that if you will reflect long and deeply on that love, along with other believers, there are transforming delights and holy fullnesses sufficient to thrill the soul, fuel sacrifice and give courage even unto death.

What could follow but a majestic doxology?

Worshipping - Our Rejoicing in God (v.20-21)

The ministry is not only rooted in our *position before God* and our *provision from God*, but us rooted in our *praise of God*. Worship is the overarching and unchanging and unending purpose of the church. Evangelism exists because God is not praised everywhere. Edification exists because God's people need to be transformed to worship and serve Him acceptably. But even in heaven with people from every tribe, tongue and people group who are the souls of men made perfect, there is still and ever will be worshipful praise of God.

Expectation - His Greatness to Us (v.20)

The God whose love cannot be measured will do for us what cannot be imagined.

Exaltation - His Glory in Himself (v.21)

The God whose power cannot be imagined will be magnified in the Church and in Christ.

God will be glorified in the church precisely because He is glorified in Christ. If we as a church long for God to be glorified and seen to be large in us, then we must at all times make much of Christ. We must exalt Him. For this will be our ever-increasing delight in on-rolling ages forever. Amen.

Conclusion

The ministry of the Chapel must be rooted in:

- Our position before God as we bow to Him in humility and honor.
- Our provision from God as we ask from Him power and perception.
- Our praise of God as we rejoice in Him both now and forever.

May our ministry return to God all the glory and honor and praise due Him.

The Essentials of a Biblical Ministry

Ephesians 4:1-10

Introduction

EVALUATION OF OUR:

- Our present day absorptions...
- Our present day distractions...

APPEAL FOR A:

- Recognition of the Biblical focus...
- Return to the Biblical emphasis...

Harmony – Maintained in a Worthy Walk (v.1-3)

The first essential of a Biblical ministry is harmony in our relationships as a community of believers together. The spiritual reality of our oneness in Christ must be lived out in our responses to one another and our relationships with one another.

From God's Prisoner

Theodoret wrote about this text, "Paul glories more in his chains than a king in his diadem." There is here a wonderful play on words aimed at adding immense weight to the appeal he is about to make. The text literally reads, "The prisoner **in** the Lord." Thus he is both the prisoner of the Lord and a prisoner for the Lord. His outward situation in Rome corresponds to his inward station before God. He is captured by God.

Further, he presses home the power of his own commitment. He is so committed to a walk worthy of his high calling that he endures imprisonment for its sake. At the very least, the community of Christ at Ephesus can commit to one another to the degree that they will apply themselves to maintain spiritual peace.

By an Apostolic Plea

Paul the prisoner, models in his appeal to them the intense tenderness that he expects in their relationships. This is not unusual for Paul. He often uses this approach in beseeching or appealing to Christians. But his pleas never displace his power. His appeals never undermine his authority. The intensity of his tenderness never brings into question the integrity of his truth. What an example he sets for us in our own responsibility and spheres of authority. What a great thing it is when we the truth we believe and the life we ought to live is shaped and shared and appealed for!

To a Worthy Practice

Here is the focus, the expectation of his appeal.

- *IT IS GREATLY NEEDED DUE TO EXTERNAL DIFFERENCES.* Chapters 1-3 are a powerfully clear argument for the unity of the Jew and Gentile in Christ. The wall that divided has been taken down by being fulfilled in the Messiah. Here is the doctrinal argument. But day after day, week after week, when Christians came together for worship or ministry, there were still Jews with their culture, dress and way of life and there were Gentiles with theirs. The conflict between those two, one insisting that their way of life was mandatory for the other, rages all through the early church, waning only with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the overwhelming number of Gentiles coming into the church at the end of the first century. So the worthy walk here is not just a wonderful theory, but is fraught with risk taking expressions of love to a people whose way of life was quite different. We hardly know this here at the Chapel where we pretty homogenous and pasteurized.
- *IT WILL GROW TO BECOME A WAY OF LIFE.* This is what is meant by the word *walk*. Rather than what follows being sporadic and incidental, it is to be a chief characteristic. In other words, the harmony was not just teeth gritting getting along at Sunday Worship. Rather, it was a dedicated, diligent effort to sustain a community as a way of life. Practically this is going to require getting out of our own comfort zone and circle of friends, working hard at relationship building stuff with people we might not understand. As every family works at these efforts, what *is pleasantness at church* becomes a deeply engrained way of life.
- *IT IS MEASURED BY OUR CALLING* into the New Covenant Messianic community of Jesus. The "calling with which we have been called" is a standard set by the doctrine of chapters 1-3. These chapters clearly establish that the church is a community, a body, a living organism. From all different languages and people groups and cultures, God is forming in Christ, by calling us to into a reconciled relationship with God and a reconciled relationship with one another. This is that high calling.

So let us live up to the high standard of reconciliation and relationship with God and with one another in Christ.

With a Humble Perspective

The way of life that involves practical choices has to arise from a godly heart that thinks about oneself rightly. So we have a high calling to humble life. This attitude is characterized by three words.

- Humility – a true estimate of ourselves as lowly because of our high view of God that produces in us a bent towards being unnoticed, unrecognized and unpraised. (Adapted from C. Hodge) Humility grows in the soil of a heart plowed by grace, seeded by the Word, watered by the Spirit and basking warm in the sunshine of the great glory of God. We have so little true humility among us because we think about ourselves way too much. Where the flower of esteem for God has been uprooted, there the weed of self-esteem will grow and flourish. True, genuine, unselfconscious lowliness is so rare today and stands out so much that it is constantly under the assault of the disdain of others or the praise of others.
- Meekness – a strength under control; an uncomplaining and unresisting attitude that produces in us an ability to bear without irritation the faults and injuries of others. (Adapted from C. Hodge) In our culture where self-assertiveness and crass boldness is often praised and promoted, the quiet power of meek person is often unnoticed. Yet, it is the meek that inherit the earth.
- Patience – the joyful endurance of difficulty in the present because of the promises for the future; an attitude that is willing to actively wait for the purpose and providence of God to accomplish what His promises have secured. It is not a fatalistic passiveness, but an active participation until the promise is realized. This definition of patience particularly bears in our relationships with believers, not to tolerate their sin but to bear with them while God is working to change them. This patience also recognizes and embraces the differences among us the enrichen and enliven us together.

I saw a bumper sticker lately that says, "Intolerance is not a family virtue." I am positive that the barrel of that bumper sticker is aimed at those whose "family values" cause them to call homosexuality and lesbianism what it is, a sinful perversion. This is not the sort of tolerance that Paul is calling for. But if I may steal the bumper sticker and place over our liberty in Christ over the things that are not sin, then beloved, *intolerance is not a family virtue.*

For a Motivating Purpose

Here is our aim. We are going to be diligent to preserve, sustain and maintain outwardly what the Spirit has created inwardly.

Note that we are not to create the unity. We are not opening our arms to sin and sinners as though they were believers, tolerating their wickedness and their doctrinal error for the simple sake of peace. This is not Biblical unity. Biblical unity, as verses 4-6 are going to show, is informed by a Biblical framework and defined by spiritual realities. So we are to maintain outwardly what actually exists inwardly.

This calls for diligent effort on our behalf. It requires careful thought and spiritual introspection and active efforts to overcome our sinful tendency to be suspicious of those who are different.

Think about someone at the chapel who rubs you the wrong way. (Pause) Now, how does that affect the way you treat them or respond to them? (Pause) Is that response a diligent effort to maintain real, vital spiritual unity? You see, loved ones, this is very easy to hear and embrace in the abstract. But can be difficult in the thorny reality of our own pride, selfishness and high-mindedness. We are bound in genuine unity in the sphere of peace.

Unity – Informed by a Biblical Framework (v.4-6)

Interesting that there is no connective here; just a simple assertion of these triune unities. The perfection of this unity is shown in that he uses the word "one" seven times. Further, there are three sets here structured around the Persons of the Trinity. So there is a unity of the Spirit (v.4), of Jesus the Lord (v.5) and of the Father God (v.6).

The unity we are to diligently maintain is deeply shaped by a Biblically informed framework. We are to work hard at the outward expression of the inward realities of spiritual (or Holy Spirit) unity described in this paragraph. Here are the grounds, the basis, the foundations of our responsibility.

In the hull of a wooden sailing boat there is a real discernable form. The outward contours are shaped by the inward framework. There is an elaborate and inner connected structure of ribs and stays that shapes and strengthens the outward planking of the hull. Remove the framework and soon the outer shapes becomes deformed and destroyed and ceases to serve its function. We have all seen the same thing in large buildings. We watch as the girders go up floor by floor and then the final shape comes into view as the outer skin of wood, metal stone or glass is applied. And we have all seen the effect of strategically placed dynamite designed to break the framework so that the building collapses in on itself.

This all points to the importance of understanding the inner framework of truth that gives shape to outer contours of our relationships and responsibilities...**EXPAND**

Oneness by the Holy Spirit

(v.4)

We are bound together by the Holy Spirit into a common Body for a shared future. There is one Body, one Spirit and one Hope. The Body of Christ is being built up member by member, person by person all over the world giving us an organic, vital, living union, not just with those of us gathered here at the Chapel, but all over the world. This building up work is being done by the Spirit's impartation of life through His indwelling in the souls of elect men and women. This binds us together for the glorious future God has promised to His people, that is to say, our hope.

Oneness under the Lord Jesus

(v.5)

We are bound together by a publicly confessed allegiance to our Sovereign Lord. There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. We are one under our one and only Sovereign Lord. To Him and Him alone do we owe our allegiance. There is no other Lord to the church but our Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one correct and to be believed message, the faith. Truth matters. We are to diligently maintain unity with those who confess the truth. There is no virtue in union with error.

Does the baptism here refer to our being immersed in water or to our placing into the Body of Christ by the Spirit? It can easily be either. Because this verse is referring to the confession of Jesus as Lord, of a body of doctrine called the faith, then it is easy to see that this is water baptism whereby a public confession and an identification with the church is made. But it also could be a reference to the Holy Spirit's baptism of us into Christ gathering up that meaning from the prior verse, which refers to the Body and the Spirit. Taking it either way creates no doctrinal problems. There is only one baptism of the Spirit in the life of God's people. And there is a common form of baptism whereby a person professes belief and shows that we are one with Christ and one with His people. Whichever it is, we are bound together by the Spirit by being placed into the Body and we are bound together publicly by being placed into water, something some of you need to do on October 8th.

I have raised my hand to heaven and sworn allegiance to the King of Kings. No earthly power can command my loyalty. My allegiance is confessed in a creed, the faith taught by the Word of God. And I have, before God's people passed through the waters of baptism to make my allegiance public, that I am God's and a part of God's people.

Oneness filled by the Father God

(v.6)

We bound together by the all-encompassing presence and power of our Father God. He is in unison acclaimed as above all, the supreme Sovereign of the universe; through all, acting so as to accomplish His purposes; and in you all, dwelling in believers with all of His great and gracious Fatherhood.

So we are one. We are one, truly one at a fundamental, spiritual level. This is not just esoteric theology or obscure, hard doctrine. That we are truly one through a sharing in the Body, the Spirit, the hope, the Lord, the faith, the baptism and the Father means we had better bend every effort to bind ourselves together in peace by being humble, meek and patient with one another.

Diversity – Shaped by a Grace Distribution

(v.7-10)

True unity is a grace from within; while uniformity is a pressure from without. The unity that is expected and explained in verses 1-6 operates in the environment of diversity. We are all different, not just at the flesh-life level of personality, ability and experience, but also at the spiritual enablement level of grace giftedness. There is an essential unity of Jew and Gentile in the midst of the chaos and confusion of a fallen world. There is a practical unity in the midst of the God-given diversity of various spiritual enablements. This variety must be supported, embraced and maintained for ministry is utterly dependent on it.

This begins with the word *but*. So a contrast is going to be brought forward. Now we must watch carefully here. Sometimes Paul begins like this to say, "Not that, **but instead** this..." And sometimes Paul begins like to say, "Yes that, **but additionally** this..." So our unity and our diversity are not to be set at odds with one another. But too often, this is exactly what happens.

Its Practical Principles

(v.7)

Now I see three simple principles here that are fleshed out more fully in other letters of Paul.

- What is given here is given to each one and to everyone. It is both personal and universal. None of you who are truly a believer can say that I do not have an ability from God. And each of you have at least one that is for you.
- What is given here is an enabling grace. It is an ability to serve God in the body. We don't know that necessarily from this text, but from scores of others. Every believer has some function in the Body. No believer is a vestigial organ (an organ that has no apparent function). The enabling and motivating gift or gifts may use a

natural ability or talent and can profit from past experience. But it doesn't have to. So our chief musician has gifts of teaching and exhortation that operate within the purpose of worship and music.

- What is given here is measured out and distributed by Christ. This means that you do not get to decide what your giftedness is. How you use it is often up to you. This is simply another way we bow to God's purposes and providences.

Further, I see three important ideas arising from the way this text sits in its context.

- There is a diversity empowered in our unity. We have already said much about this. Our unity does not require uniformity. We must be more together than we could ever be apart. So the Body of Christ is not all arms or legs or hands or toes.
- There is a design purposed for our unity. The very distribution of these gifts to each and every believer requires that there be a fundamental unity underlying it all. So the Body of Christ is each part in its proper place doing its proper function.
- There is a difficulty presented to our unity. The difficulty is that we as Christians *see, experience and respond to truth through the lens of our spiritual gifts*. So a person with a gift of prophecy and a person with a gift of mercy will probably have very different perspectives on the process of church discipline. These God given differences whose design to complete and equip the Body for its full functioning of ministry then become serious challenges to our unity.

As an aside for those of you to whom much of this is new and to those of you who are not sure what your spiritual gifts may be, we will be teaching on this later in the fall and winter including some practical instruction and insight into what your gifts may be and how you can use them to serve God at the Chapel.

Its Biblical Proof

(v.8)

Let me rush on. Paul quotes here from Psalm 68. My own study of the Word has led me to believe that Paul does not intend here to quote verse 18, word for word. Rather, in language close to that of Psalm 68:18, he is capturing the whole Psalm. So the giving of grace gifts to the people of God is an act of the victoriously ascended King.

I wish that I had the time to develop Psalm 68 for you. In it, the Psalmist calls for God to arise for His people and describes the mighty victory God's moving accomplished. Scattered all through it are jewels of praise and worship, ascribing to God greatness and glory. Paul then sees this Psalm in a redemptive-historical way as

having the Lord Jesus Christ as its ultimate referent, the one to whom it finally points and in whom it is finally fulfilled.

Its Clarifying Parenthetical

(v.9-10)

Now the use of this text would raise a simple question. Why would the Messiah have to ascend? He resided in heaven. He rules from heaven. So then how can the Psalmist and Paul say that He will return to heaven?

The point of this is simply that the ascension of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, demands the descent of the Messiah. The NLT renders this so well, "Notice that it says, 'He ascended.' This means that Christ first came down to the lowly world in which we live. The same one who came down is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that his rule might fill the entire universe." It's almost like Paul cannot resist reminding people that scattered all through the Old Testament are clear (if you have eyes to see and the veil lifted from them) references to the incarnation of the Messiah.

Conclusion

So what do we say to this? Let's think about these things in closing.

- What we do in ministry must be deeply shaped by who we are in Christ. We must think about and meditate much more on truths like those in Ephesians 1-3 as we begin to reflect and develop Biblical ministry.
- Change and transition and growth all present us with manifold opportunities to be humble, meek, patient and to show tolerance and forbearance with others.
- I challenge all of you once again to make your commitment to ministry at the Chapel, to be baptized if you have not and to join in membership.
- Let us begin now to embrace the diversity, enjoy the differences and employ the dynamic that comes because God has given gifts to each and every one of us.

We raise our hand to heaven,
To swear allegiance to the Sovereign God of the Universe
and
To become a church
of God-pursuers,
and God-lovers,
humbled under His Word,
emboldened by His Holy Spirit,
empowered to gladly spread God's fame,
proclaiming His glory
at all cost
to people everywhere.

The Aims of a Biblical Ministry

Ephesians 4:11-16

Introduction

One of the very great challenges to handling the Word of God is to get it right. We come to a text like this that is so familiar, it is easy to breeze through it without thinking carefully about what it is saying. Further, we come to texts like this, focusing in a key buzzword. So it is hard sometimes to really hear the text. I know that some of what I say this morning will grate across many of your grids. What we are doing all the time is humbling ourselves under the Word.

From the context we learn that a Biblical ministry is rooted in prayer and requires harmony, unity and diversity. This brings us this morning as to the reasons for a Biblical ministry.

It is imperative that we come to the Scriptures to determine what the aims and objectives of a Biblical ministry will be. Otherwise, we will substitute objectives driven by our own felt needs in place of the aims whose purposes will please God.

Its Practice – Building Up the Church (v.11-12)

The first aim for Biblical ministry is in its practice of ministry, to build up the members of the church.

In the Abilities for Ministry (v.11)

The first aim of a Biblical ministry is related to the enabling and giving of its leadership. The flow of the text is simply that God has given gifts to men and then has given these gifted men to the church.

Let's keep the emphasis where it is supposed to be in this text. The point here is not that God has established these offices, but rather that He has given these kinds of men. Careful thought here will show the overlap between the roles and functions represented in the words here and the offices in the church.

Clarifying their Identity

There is somewhat of a natural breakdown here. The first two are primarily serving as *Word givers*. God has given gifted men to the church in order that the wee might have a sure word from God. The second two are *Word proclaimers*. God has given gifted men to the church in order that we might declare the Word we have received.

But we cannot get around the need to identify, briefly, who these are.

- *APOSTLES* – Those given to the church as apostles were given and called by God as His chosen messengers to whom He had shown Himself after the resurrection and who were commissioned to es-

establish the foundations upon which the church would be built. This foundation was laid in their commission, their giving of the Word and their attesting sign miracles. It is our considered opinion that there are no apostles in the church today.

- *PROPHETS* – Those given to the church as prophets were called by God to both transmit His Word and to preach to the sins of the people. They have a commission from God, making their ministry more than the larger gift of prophecy exercised by generally. They began with a larger fore-telling, prophetic function that began to diminish until ending with the completing of Scripture while its forth-telling, proclaiming function increased.
- *EVANGELISTS* – Those given to the church as evangelists were to preach the gospel to the lost with the aim to establish new churches. It is very important not to read the modern idea of a *revivalist* back into this text. Our modern church planting missionaries actually are closer in function to a Biblical evangelist.
- *SHEPHERD-TEACHERS* – Those given to the church as shepherd-teachers were enabled by God to shepherd the church particularly in teaching and preaching the Word to the church.

Now, it is imperative that I spend just a few moments talking about these Shepherd-Teachers (or Pastor-Teachers). I believe there is much confusion in the church today on this topic. It usually surprises people to find out that this is the only time in Scripture this occurs. Apostles and prophets and evangelists are discussed much more in Scripture. We can name the Apostles, including Paul. We can name prophets, like Agabus. We can name evangelists, like Philip. But we are never once told by name that "so and so" was a Shepherd-Teacher. Since this is so, we must be very careful that we do not do more with this than the Scriptures allow.

I am also very aware that what I am about to say from this text contradicts the way our present Constitution is set up. The Elders discussed and formally affirmed a declaration on Eldership and the Shepherd-Teachers last Wednesday Evening. We did so in view of the fact that we wanted to be unanimous in our view so that we could both teach it to you and incorporate it into our new Constitution whose 1st draft is currently being reviewed. One of my aims this evening is to lay out our reasons for a new Constitution and the planning for it. I would encourage all of you to be back this evening.

What are the common views on who these Shepherd-Teachers are?

First, there are those who say that these are simply the elders of the church. All Shepherd-Teachers are elders and all elders are Shepherd-Teachers. This is argued primarily from that fact that elders must be able to teach and are to shepherd the church. One of the problems

with this is that there were apostles and prophets who were elders as well, Peter and John being prime examples. Further, Paul is not here emphasizing the office, but the man given to serve or function in these ways.

Second, there are those who say that this is a separate office, either distinct from the elders or an office among the elders. This is the common view in many churches today and is probably what most of you believed when you came to the Chapel. This establishes three offices in the church, Pastor-Teacher, Elder and Deacon. Certainly, the problem here is that nowhere in the New Testament apart from this phrase, is there any reference to three offices. Elsewhere, it is always the elders and the deacons; so, we have clear qualifications for and instructions on elders and deacons, but have nothing like that for the so-called Pastor-Teacher.

We believe that this is a *recognized role* among the elders. 1 Timothy 5:17 says that there will be those elders whose hard labor in the word and doctrine, in preaching and teaching, is to be recognized and is to be financially supported when possible. They will have the gift of teaching and will be enabled by God above the others to preach and teach publicly. So all Shepherd-Teachers are elders, but not all elders will be Shepherd-Teachers.

Now, the Chapel elders have adopted a declaration that involves three distinct areas: what we affirm, what we deny and what we aim for. Lest this whole message becomes consumed with two words in this paragraph, let me summarize briefly what we affirm, deny and what we aim for.

We affirm that the church has two offices, elder and deacons; that the elders together as equals on a council or body, govern the church on a principle of unanimity; that there are different roles among the elders along the axis of their spiritual gifts, abilities and experience; that there will be leaders among the elders on the principle of first among equals; that we must identify, recognize and, as God allows, support financially those elders who work hard at governing (administrating) and at preaching and teaching. We deny that there is a separate office from or on the eldership called Pastor or Pastor-Teacher because we have affirmed this as a *recognized role*, not an office with special authority over the church or the elders.

Let me say this as well: as one who has been recognized in the Shepherd-Teacher role and is financially supported by the Chapel, I wholeheartedly embrace the declaration as the heart and passion of my own personal ministry among the congregation with the elders. I do not seek an office, only to work hard at word and doctrine, at preaching and teaching to serve God, His Kingdom and His people and to do so for His glory, looking for His "well-done."

In the Activities of Ministry

The leadership is responsible to equip the membership for what God is calling them to do. The word "equip" is sometimes translated, "perfect" which might capture the wider nuances here. God has given the gifted men to the church in order to bring believers to completion, edified spiritually for holiness and equipped practically for ministry.

The membership is responsible to minister or serve, to do the work of the ministry. Though we sometimes call what the elders do, "the ministry" it is evident that all believers are to be doing the work of the ministry. So while it is our responsibility to equip God's people, it is yours to do His work. The old notion that we hire pastors to do the work of the ministry is simply not Biblical. Christianity is not a spectator sport. So let me encourage each of you and all of you to get involved in the ministry here at the Chapel.

In the Aim of Ministry

Our activity in ministry is aimed at building up the Body of Christ. Now what does that mean? It is a word drawn from the analogy of constructing a building. Generally, and particularly in this paragraph, Paul is using the analogy to refer to the community of Christ. There is a course upon course laying of block and brick, setting of windows, framing of rafters and roofing that is life in community. Nathan's email and nickname are "buildinman". That ought well to be the nickname of every believer. We are about the ministry of building up the Body.

Its Purpose – Unifying the Church

(v.13)

The second aim of Biblical ministry is in its purpose to unify the church in a maturity measured by Christ. We are at work equipping and serving until what is in this verse is complete.

In Its Biblical Content

The church is to be aiming at attaining a unity in faith. Faith here refers to the body of doctrine that must be believed and taught. We recognize, for example, that many who first come to the church have not been well taught in doctrine so that affirming a complex statement of doctrine for membership is not very useful. So there is a difference between the *TRUTHS WE TREASURE* for union and communion and the *TRUTHS WE TEACH* into which we grow as we learn them and live them out.

Today we have the destructive effect on the church at large in that unity is prized more than truth; so, doctrine is being pared down so as to achieve unity, albeit a false one at that. It is not that we must reduce

what is to be commonly believed, but we must clarify and communicate and confess what is to be believed and then, acknowledge and fellowship with those as true brothers and sisters in the Lord.

So we strive for a unity in the faith we confess.

In Its Personal Communion

The church is to be aiming at attaining a unity in our communion with Christ. Knowledge here is not "data" but "real experiential devotion" with Christ. We are aiming to bring all of us together in our real fellowship and communion with God. We do not want this apart from knowledge, but as the fruit of knowledge. There is an enormous difference between knowing about God and knowing God. We are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. We are called to do this individually and corporately. Our fellowship with God here ought to be the corporate, together expression of what has been happening all week.

So we strive for a unity in our fellowship with God.

In Its Final Criteria

The church is to be aiming at attaining a unity in our fullness of Christ. The Scriptures here establish the standard, set the criteria. We are pursuing becoming a mature man according to the measure of Christ. The fullness of Christ in us together shapes us for a life of holiness and usefulness. That the fullness of Christ is the standard to measure our maturity by, exposes so much of what is written and talked about as the Christian life today. So much of the pop books on the Christian life establish standards and criteria that have little to do with the maturity measured by Christ's fullness.

So we strive for a unity in our maturity in Christ.

Its Product – Growing Up the Church (v.14-16)

That brings us quite naturally to the sentence beginning in verse 14. The last aim of Biblical ministry is in its product of a grown up church in its doctrine and dynamic.

In our Maturing Doctrine (v.14-15)

The result of a church shaping its ministry by Biblical aims is that its members are no longer children. So we aim to produce believers who are all grown up spiritually.

What are the marks of a believer who is all grown up? We are no longer susceptible to constantly changing and deceptively couched error, but are able to articulate truth in love.

Imagine a small ship out on the wide ocean as the storms and winds and waves roar. The ship is tossed about barely able to maintain its sense of position and direction. It is in great danger. And so are those who give ear to and are influenced by error. He elaborates on the danger by indicating that believers who are not yet grown up are gullible: that is, they are susceptible to instability by constantly changing doctrine, by the men's slight of hand in the handling of Scripture and the wording of doctrine, by a kind of dishonest scheming to influence people and churches. As the NLT renders this, "Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and makes the lie sound like the truth."

In contrast, grown up believers know how to hold and speak the truth in love. There are two things here: knowing what the truth is and knowing how to articulate that truth. The emphasis is on the *knowing how*. It is contrasted with the lying, clever, scheming speech that attempts to dissuade people from the truth. Also, I fear that sometimes we who believe God has graciously taught us much have little learned the love and mercy and grace that accompanied our learning of it. So we have the truth, but with a vengeance. Beloved, growing up in maturity as a believer ought to fill your head with truth, your heart with love and your tongue with grace so that you hold to the truth in love.

By the way, don't yank this verse out of its context so that this becomes some general rule of communication. There is a way of using this verse that sounds like this, "In love, I need to tell you that that is an ugly hat." And, "Honey, I have eaten this all our marriage, but I need to tell you the truth: this doesn't taste good." Yes, it is true that we need to not lie to one another. And yes, we need to govern all our speech with love, grace and kindness. It's just that you should not bend this text to serve that end. The truth referred to here is that body of faith, doctrine that when spoken in the sphere of love causes us to grow up in all aspects.

In our Body Dynamic

(v.16)

The result of a church shaping its ministry by Biblical aims is that its growth arises from members who are functioning properly. Once again, the NLT captures this so well, "Under His direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."

What emerges from a Biblically aimed ministry are a people with a deeply balanced spirituality and a fully functioning body life and ministry. It is a people and ministry who are focused, not just on coming to church on Sunday, but also on building and maintaining and completing a mature community in Christ.

Conclusion

Our *PURSUIING* the aims of a Biblical ministry will significantly stretch and challenge us. It will challenge some of our cherished notions about leadership and ministry in the church.

Our *PASSION* for ministry is the glory of Christ and the good of His people. This comes together in our aim in ministry to bring you to a maturity that is measured by the fullness of Christ.

Our *PRACTICE* of a Biblical ministry involves each of us being fully engaged in the use of our gifts, abilities and experience to serve the rest of the body. Some of us will be equipping you to do your work. And all of us must be doing our part so that we will become complete in Christ.

So we will aim at the proper working of each individual part, causing the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Notes