

Part 7: Measuring Up the Church

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I have something to share with you today which might be a betrayal of the secrets of men, but I'm going to share it with you anyway.

For some men, I might even go as far to say most men, there is something very odd which happens whenever we walk into a new social space. We begin to look around us, at the other men who are there, and we begin to find our rank. We make note of who we could outlive in a game of Desert Island, who we could defeat in no-rules hand-to-hand combat, and who we could outsmart in a game of wits.

For instance, one day after school I asked my son, who was in kindergarten at the time, if he was the tallest person in his class and he provided for me a detailed list of who the top 5-10 tallest people in his class were. As well as where he measured up in the list of five and six year olds.

But don't we all have a sort of desire to see how we measure up to those around us? Whether it's in social media, or approval ratings at work, commissions gained, children birthed, degrees granted, or the style of our clothes or houses. There is always some standard, real or perceived that we are measuring ourselves against.

We have been working through the book of Ephesians, which is a letter written to a church in what is modern day Turkey. For those who have been studying the book along with us, you have noticed that the book is split perfectly in half. In chapters one through three, Paul unveils the whole plan of God for us. God's plan is to redeem and create for himself a church through Jesus Christ. Paul then defines the church's composition (anyone and everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord regardless of race or social status) and the church's end goal (to display the manifold wisdom and glory of God through Jesus Christ).

That's the first half of the book, but now today we begin the second half of the book where Paul looks at the church which Jesus created through grace, and he helps the church understand how it should measure up in light of such a miracle. In fact look at how he opens our passage today: **Ephesians 4:1**.

Paul wants to help the church not only understand how it was formed, but how it should act. This is important for us as we are in the middle of a building fund. It can be all too easy to see that the church is something deeply important to God, and put all of our eggs into the basket of providing a building for this church. "If we can get a building, then we will measure up."

But how do we assess if our church if our church is working in a biblical way? What is the gospel ministry that Jesus has given the church to do? How do we measure our faithfulness as a church whether we own a building or not? And what does all of this mean for you?

In other places we see the external mission of the church being defined. Jesus himself did this: Go therefore making disciples of all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.

But here Paul is focusing more specifically on the internal ministry of the church, the stepping stone upon which all external ministry depends. And what we are going to see today is that Paul is going to show us the measure of a church by providing for us three truths about our life in the church: The church is **united in salvation, diverse in gifts, and dependent in ministry.**

Let's start by looking at our first point today: **United in salvation.** Read with me, **Ephesians 4:1-6.**

Now if you were listening, there were two words Paul used with the dramatic effect in this text. Word number one was the word "call." Verse one, "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Verse four, "just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call."

Salvation is often referred to a call, and the word call carries with it something important doesn't it? Calls force our interaction. We answer calls. We follow calls. The Apostle Peter says that Jesus' saved us by calling us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. The Greek word for church shares a root with the word "called." The church is not simply a gathering, but it is a gathering of "the called out ones."

To be called by Jesus is to be called to a new life in Jesus. Salvation is first and foremost answering the call of Jesus to come to him. And if we answer that call, we lay down the need to define what that call looks like. Jesus gets to determine his call. He provides the measuring stick or what it looks like to be his disciple.

Wrapped up in this call is a togetherness which is seen in the second word Paul favors in this text: one. One body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God.

Now there is a sense where emphasizing the "one-ness" of Christianity stresses an exclusiveness. There is one name which saves, and Paul himself affirms that. But in this passage Paul isn't emphasizing exclusivity but inclusivity. Everyone who is saved by grace through faith, is saved by the same God, believes in the same Lord Jesus, is filled by the same Spirit, comforted by the same hope, and baptized in the same baptism.

In other words the call of salvation not only calls us to Jesus, but it also calls us to other believers. It calls us to live life together as local churches. This is something Paul made really clear in the first part of the book. The way God gathers people to himself is uniquely complimented and designed around the way in which God gathers his people together as the church. Life together in God's church isn't an add-on for the social believers, it is essential to the very nature of your salvation.

And we see how essential this gathering together is when we notice how Paul defines the manner we should walk in light of our call: **Ephesians 4:1-3.**

Humility, gentleness and patience are some characteristic measures of a Christian. And each of these characteristics imply a closeness to others. Paul makes this clear in the way he defines patience. He says immediately after it, "What do I mean by patience? I mean bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

My guess is that most of us in here would say that we are relatively patient people. But the patience Paul describes is not the low hanging patience we might have. I can be very patient when it comes to waiting for my Amazon package to get here. I know it takes time. Maybe you are from a generation

where things too longer, and you are naturally more patient when it comes to waiting on products, mail, and at round-a-bouts.

But this is not the type of patience Paul is talking about. It is easy to wait on things. It is harder to bear with people. I understand that it takes 2-4 business days to get my packager, but I don't understand why they guy I'm discipling can't make time to read his Bible.

But patience as defined by Paul, is a patience that assumes we will be challenged by people to be impatient. To quickly write off those who struggle where we do not, or who slow us down where we are strong.

Life in God's church will challenge your patience, there will be people from all different stages of spiritual maturity. And as the church is committed to the disciple-making mission, it will be even messier at times. In fact it can almost be said that Paul assumes a church which doesn't challenge your interpersonal patience is probably church you should not be at.

If we aren't careful we can respond in one of three ways when our patience and humility are challenged. 1. We bounce around from church to church hoping to find one that meets our personal preferences in a more specialized way, 2. We come to church just in time to sit and leave, so that we don't have to be bothered by the relational weight of meeting or knowing those around us, or 3. We stop going to church altogether.

But Paul provides two important boundaries to these temptations: love and unity in the Spirit. It is easy to have peace at church when you guard yourselves from knowing those in church. But that's not unity in the Spirit. That is a faux peace. It's not real.

And it is easy to run from those who might challenge your patience, but that is not love. Love is being drawn to others because we see others as Jesus saw us. These believers around you are blood bought brothers and sisters in Christ and their sin is no more impossible to deal with than yours was. You were not by birth, more nobler for faith than they were. They are no less a part of God's church than you are. And even though we are by no means perfect, we are being perfect by a merciful God.

There is this beautiful tension in the church which would do well to not ignore. This tension is that on the one hand we are still so far from the church we will one day be in glory. One day sins will be removed and no one will be hurt by other believers. But on the other hand, this gathered body is the closest we will get to that glory here on earth. In heaven we will live eternally with people who are different than us but who have been redeemed in full by Jesus Christ. The local gathering of believers actually reflects the Kingdom of God in a way Glacier National Park cannot.

The gospel unites ordinary, broken people to each other by grace. This is the miracle of the church. But inside of this unity is a wonderful diversity. Notice the unique way in which Paul stresses this: **Ephesians 4:5-10**.

Did you catch Paul's clever little twist: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one lord, on faith, one baptism, one God, gifts given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ.

Here we see Paul's second point the church is **Diverse in Gifts**.

Here we have something which I hope will comfort you today: if you are a believer in Jesus, whether for a day or for a decade, Jesus has given you a gift of grace as measured according to his own gift.

There are lots of things which pop into our mind when we think about spiritual gifts. But there are three specific aspects of these gifts that Paul wants us to know in this passage.

First, Jesus has given each of his redeemed brothers and sisters a gift. In fact Paul quotes Psalm 68 here to make this point. In Psalm 68, David comes back from defeating the Lord's enemies and offers gifts to God. But in Ephesians 4, Paul recognizes the way in which Jesus fulfills this psalm, and after Jesus comes to the cross and conquers the enemies of God's people, Jesus gives gifts to us.

Wrapped up in your salvation are gifts given by God to you specifically. People can often go overboard trying to discern which gift they have, and you can pay lots of money online to try and sort all of that out. But I think a more biblical and accurate way to discern these graces is to ask yourself these questions: Where am I passionate and where am I skilled? And when you are able to discern the overlap of those two places ask yourself: "How can I use this to serve the advancement of the gospel?"

The second aspect Paul wants us to see is, because each gift is measured out by Christ's costly sacrifice, we don't bemoan because our gift doesn't look like someone else's. Jesus doesn't shop interstate gift shops. He doesn't give to some, cheap trinkets and to others gifts of great value. Jesus gives to all out of the vast wealth of his sacrifice on the cross.

Your gift is not measured by how Jesus sees your value or your ability. Your gift is measured by the immense value of his sacrifice for you. There is no room for infighting or bickering in the body of Christ because the King himself has bestowed them to us.

And lastly, Jesus gave gifts for a purpose. That's why Paul adds that little aside. "He who descended is the one who ascended so that he might fill all things." In other words, Jesus' saving work in your life provides for you a wonderful purpose in participating in Christ's work to fill and subdue all things.

Remember the goal Paul gave for all time? The one thing that God and God alone can do to fix the mess that we are in? **Ephesians 1:9-10**. God is going to unite all things in Jesus Christ, and how is he going to do that? He is going to do it by equipping his church with gifts for that very purpose.

You see I want you to understand this: Jesus saves you on purpose for a purpose. This really is a wonderful reality. Jesus saves you on purpose. This is the point Paul has been making in chapters 1-3. In the end of chapter one we see that all the power of God himself was mobilized to save his church. In chapter three, last week, we saw that all the love of Jesus was spent intentionally to establish us in our salvation. Salvation by God is an intentional and measured effort for broken people. It's on purpose.

This is unique, and if you are not a believer, or if you are a believer who wrestles with God's love I want you to hear this. You being saved is not a byproduct of God trying to reach another goal. For instance I was doing a little plumbing project at my house the other day and I needed one small PVC pipe to do it.

So I went to the store, and picked up the piece which was four dollars. But, I had no cash and the limit for a credit card transaction was five dollars. So I looked over and saw they had a candy basket, with a Reese's chocolate bar in it, and I knew my wife loved Reeses. So I said, "Well this works out quite nicely

doesn't it." I get what I wanted, and my wife can think I'm an amazing husband while I'm at it. It's a win-win.

That is not how our salvation works. It was not a sensible add on to God's plan for his glory. God has set forth to save you because he loves you, God's glory and his love culminate in his salvation. It was on purpose. But it was also for a purpose.

Salvation in Jesus Christ gives you a purpose for all of your life. You are a captive commissioned by a king and given a gift to do the exact task which he has called you to do.

In our world today the measure of a person is often in their utility, "Can you do this for me? Can you provide this for me?" And if you can't, we will find someone who can. But here in the gospel we see the wonderful grace of Jesus. He has given you exactly what you needed. He has provided you belonging based on his own mercy. You are no less capable to do what Jesus has called you to do than Jesus was capable of saving you.

And this work can be done whether you work for a tech company or are a stay-at-home mom. What is this task? That as we have been given a grace according to the measure of Christ's gift, that we would use those gifts and that grace to grow up more and more to look like Christ.

You see there is no measure for a Christian individual or a Christian church except Jesus. We are to daily grow up to be more like Christ, and the truth is that this is why we need the church. We need each other to do this.

This is Paul's final point today, the church is **Dependent in ministry**. We are dependent upon each other to do what Jesus has called us to do.

Read with me, **Ephesians 4:11-16**.

To show how dependent we are upon each other for ministry Paul does two things in this section. First he defines ministers, and then he defines ministry.

In defining ministers he starts where we would imagine he would start. He starts with the historic leaders of God's people. Part of the gifts which Jesus gives were the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament.

This is the third time in the book of Ephesians Paul has used this couplet of "apostles and prophets" and each time he is using it to express the whole plan of God across the Old and New Testament.

Then he speaks of the evangelists, we aren't quite sure if Paul means people like Titus and Timothy in the New Testament, or if it means those dedicated to missions for the sake of evangelism, or if it is just people who are extraordinarily gifted in sharing the gospel.

But then he goes on to describe pastors and he does so by calling them shepherds (which is the root word for pastor) and teachers. The role of local elders is to shepherd God's flock and teach God's flock.

Now when we think of ministry, these are the kinds of people we think of. They do ministry. And indeed they do. But what is their ministry? Look back at **Ephesians 4:11-12**. The ministry of the leaders of God's church, historic and present, is to equip all believers for the work of ministry.

This means that in God's word, in God's Spirit, and in God's church he has given you everything you need to be a capable minister of the gospel in this church. It is not only the responsibility of the pastors of a church to do ministry, but it is the responsibility of the congregation to be ministers, servants of one another.

You are called, you are gifted, and you are gathered so that you might build up the body of Christ with those around you. I think as a whole there is a sense of discontent for modern believers in the church because we aren't using the church as we ought.

We often see the church more akin to a concert. We gather together and we consume a product performed by professionals. Then during the week we can perhaps show our fandom for our band by letting people know that they too can come and see what is going on.

But if this is how you view church, Paul says you are setting yourself up for disappointment. Church is less like a concert and more like the world's greatest Zumba class. It's like a gym. Imagine if you bought your friend a gift membership to a local gym, and in a follow up conversation you asked him, "How do you like it?" And he replied, "We'll it's ok I guess, but I don't really see why you like it?" You maybe say something like, "What do you mean?" "Well I go there once a week, and I pull up a chair and watch the spinning class but I'm not really getting anything out of it."

How many of us treat church the same way? Paul is saying that ministry together as the church is people coming together to actually be built up, to work out together, for the sake of greater ministry. When you come you might not be on stage, you might not be preaching, but the worship leaders and the preachers are not performing for you. They are leading you in the work out. They want you to participate at a bodily level with what is going on.

So far Paul has said that a lot is going on when the church gathers. When the church gathers, the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed. When the church gathers God is being uniquely glorified. And here we see when the church gathers, believers are being equipped for ministry.

Paul defines ministers by saying: you are a minister. You are responsible for the work of ministry. So then he defines what ministry is: **Ephesians 4:12-14**.

Ministry, the building up of the body of Christ, is helping each other grow in two areas: our unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Meaning that as a believers you are equipped by God himself to help people know with clarity what we believe and to also know relationally the Jesus in whom we believe. Ministry is helping people with their doctrine and with their devotion.

And Paul paints a realistic picture of what this looks like. He says if we do this well, people won't be a spiritual children, people won't believe whatever wind of false doctrine floats their way, and people won't be deceived by false teachers.

But he assumes at the same time that every church will have people like that. Because he then equips us how to deal with it. He says because genuine believers can still be immature, gullible and vulnerable, speak the truth in love and continue to grow up in every way into Jesus who is the head.

You see this is why we are so dependent upon each other, and the various gifts that God has given this church if we want to be a healthy church. A healthy church is not a church of only mature believers. And a healthy church is not a church of immature believers.

A healthy church is a church where believers from all different walks of life are helping other believers from all different walks in life. You are needed here.

Look at how Paul closes this text: **Ephesians 4:15-16**. You see if we want to be a church built up in love we must learn to be a church built up in ministry. We must learn to see the calling and the gift that Jesus has given to us put it to work in this context.

And you see this perpetual motion machine Paul talks about here. The means Paul gives to help the church grow in maturity are two-fold: speak the truth in love to others, and continue to grow personally into Christ as an individual.

And this is great because there will be seasons where, in our weakness, we are not growing up into Christ. But in those moments our brothers and sisters who are growing will come alongside of us and speak words of encouragement and correction to us. And then as we become encouraged to grow we return the favor to others when they are weak.

How do we do this? Where do we start? In closing here are three clear points of application for you to start participating in the ministry of the church.

First: Start speaking. Ministry starts for Paul, by speaking. Actions are great and needed, but speaking is innately relational. Talk to people here on Sundays. Talk with people in your neighborhood. Talk to people in your grocery store. Join a Community Group. Start speaking to people. Because it sets up the next step.

Start speaking the truth. What is the truth? Well it certainly can be places where our lives our out of line with the gospel, but in the most basic sense it is the gospel. As you speak to people in here and outside of here, where is the truth of the gospel showing up? In fact I would encourage you to have at least one gospel conversation this week with someone who is not part of your own family.

It could be someone here in this church or it could be someone outside of the church. But start speaking the truth.

And lastly. Start speaking the truth in love. Where the first two are actions points, this last one is a prayer point. Pray that God would give you over to a ministry motivated in love. The same love that saved you is the same love which should stir us to ministry.

A church is united in salvation, diverse in gifts and dependent in ministry. This is the measure of a church according to Paul, and just as you individually are gifted by Jesus to do what he has called you to do, so too are we as a church perfectly gifted to work as God has called us to work by grace.