

Love, Service, and Maturity – Ephesians 4:1-16

You received something special in the mail today. The postmark reads “London, England.” The heavy linen paper smells faintly of lilac. Inside the first envelope is a second and your name is written in calligraphy across the front. Tucked inside is a gold-embossed invitation. Underneath the sheer vellum covering it reads:

*You are cordially invited to Tea
Buckingham Palace
Saturday, February 25, 2012
4 o'clock in the afternoon
Her Royal Majesty
Queen Elizabeth II*

(Right now you're thinking this is silly, but play along for just a moment. I promise there's a point.)

After you accepted the invitation and booked your plane reservations what would you do? Perhaps you'd go shopping for something “appropriate” – maybe even a hat and gloves! Then you might do a little research about how to greet the queen and how to address her. I discovered that a curtsy is the traditional greeting for a woman. “Your Majesty” is the correct first response and then “ma'am” is sufficient every time after that.

If I were invited to tea with the Queen of England I would do everything possible to dress, speak, and act in a way that was worthy of the occasion and the company. I'm sure you would too.

Yet, we've received an invitation far greater than an afternoon at Buckingham Palace and we don't always respond in a worthy manner. Our Creator has invited us to join Him in heaven for eternity. What's our response?

Called to Love

Read Ephesians 4:1-3 and fill in the blanks.

Live a life _____ of the _____ you've received.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul beautifully describes our great salvation. This is the “calling” (or “vocation” in the KJV) he refers to in 4:1. Our “calling” is our invitation from God to partake of the divine blessings of redemption. If you have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ you have received this calling.

Paul's encouragement to live a life worthy of the One who saved us is not merely a suggestion or recommendation. The Greek word translated as “urge” is a serious appeal. Paul pleads with the

Ephesians – and with us - to live the kind of life that adequately reflects what God has done for us. Since God has saved us from eternal destruction our lives should show it.

In verse two Paul mentions four character traits that will be displayed in a “worthy” life. Next to each one listed below, write the antonym of that trait.

Humility:

Gentleness:

Patience expressed in forbearance:

Love:

How will exhibiting these positive traits help us maintain peace and unity with other Christians (vs 3)? What would happen if we displayed their antonyms instead?

The Greek word translated as “love” in verse two is *agape*. *Agape* is the kind of love God has for His Son – and for us. It is love expressed in deliberate action and God set the example.

But demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8. NIV).

Agape seeks the welfare of others. It is not based on fickle emotions, but on an act of the will. It is not dependent on the character of the object of love, but on the character of the giver.

Why is the truth that God’s love for us is based on His choice and character important?

Read John 13:34-35. What did Jesus command us to do and why?(Note: “Love” in this passage is “agape.”)

Why does agape expressed in the church have such an impact on the world?

Unity Modeled in the Trinity

Read Ephesians 4:4-6. How many times does Paul use the word “one?”

Paul moves from urging us to unity with each other in verse three to highlighting the unity of our Trinitarian God in verses 4 to 6. Biblical scholars believe Paul based these three verses on a creed of the early church. This creed teaches us important truths about God:

The unity of the church reflects the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The same Spirit indwells each believer, each local church, and the universal church.

The presence of the Spirit connects believers to each other and makes unity possible.

All believers are unified by faith in the same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Water baptism identifies believers with Christ and each other.

The same Father reigns with sovereignty over all and in all.

Gifts for Service

Read Ephesians 4:7-13.

Paul now moves from the unity of the body to the unique place of service for each individual believer within the body. The church – the body of Christ – is a living, breathing entity. Yes, unity is vital, but unity does not release the individual from obeying His God-given role. God gifts us for and calls us to a specific function. God’s goal in this is to maintain the health of the body and carry out His purposes in the world.

Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 to emphasize the truth that Christ gives gifts to people. The ascended, exalted Christ not only fills the entire universe with His authority and power, He also fills His people with the ability to serve Him.

Based on Ephesians 4:7 & 11 who chooses and distributes spiritual gifts to believers?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. According to verse 7 why are individual believers given spiritual gifts?

Note: Here in Ephesians 4 Paul attributes our spiritual gifts to Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 12 he calls them a “manifestation of the Spirit.” This is not a conflict but rather another testimony to the unity of the Godhead!

God gives specific spiritual gifts to individual believers in order for that believer to serve others. My gifts are not for me. Your gifts are not for you. Let's see how God wants to use them.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16. List below every purpose for our gifts you can find in these verses.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. Paul's beautiful portrait of the body of Christ teaches rich truth about the church and God's role for us in it.

Did you catch God's vision for the community of believers? We cannot be "independent" Christians. When God saved us He saved us into His family, into a community of faith. We cannot be everything God wants us to be apart from a vital connection to a local church. Our local church cannot attain "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" unless we are fulfilling our God-given and God-gifted role in the body.

Has this week's lesson expanded or changed your understanding of the church? If so, how?

Here's some ways we can interact this week:

Respond to any of today's questions in the comment section of this post. Share insights, ask questions, or simply praise our God.

Share ways the rest of the group can pray for you. If you see a request, feel free to post a prayer. That way we can all pray for each other this week.

I'd love to know if you accepted last week's challenge and encouraged someone!

Weekly Challenge

(Each week, in addition to the weekly lesson, I will provide an opportunity – for those who have the time and desire – to go a little deeper. If you are unable to do this, please don't worry, but if you can, take the plunge!)

Prayerfully reflect on your place of service in the local church. Are you fulfilling the role God designed for you? Maybe you've let the busyness of life keep you from obeying God's call. Perhaps you're doing too much and taking someone else's place of service. Ask God to show His specific place or places of service then step out in obedience.