

Date of sermon: 10/9/2021
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Ephesians 4:1-13
Title of Sermon: The Maturity of the Church
Series: The Bride - #5

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4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. **7** But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. **8** This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." **9** (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? **10** He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) **11** So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **12** to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

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I don't know if it's ever struck you -- it's kind of ironic -- but did you realize that one of the Seven Wonders of the World is all about separation? The Great Wall. It's hard to get an actual number, because it's really hard to measure it, but somewhere over 4,000 miles -- that it was built for the sole purpose of separating themselves, protecting themselves. It's kind of ironic, isn't it? A wonder of the world is about dividing. It's kind of tragic. But it's true. We live in a world very much like this, where there's a lot of things. Not just walls. But all kinds of things that separate us. Racial issues today separate us. Political issues today separate us. Medical issues today -- like never before -- separate us. It's all over the world. Oh, we've had bright spots. We have. We've had people like Desmond Tutu, who sought to reunite an extremely split South Africa. We had theologians like Karl Barth, who dared to stand up against, along with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, to Hitler. We've had people who have said, "No, we're not going to accept this segregation. We're not gonna accept this destruction of people." We've had some really bright spots, and yet, tragically, we also have a lot of illustrations. Even in the church. A lot of denominations. They tell me there are 125 different Baptist denominations all over the world. It's kind of tragic, isn't it? It's almost like we've specialized in this destruction of separation. How different it is when you read the Scriptures, when Paul is writing to this church in Ephesus, and he's telling them something very different. "If you will," he says, "tear down the wall." There should not be within the church this wall of delineation. The wall that we have had of clergy and lay, or of conservative and liberal, and -- you can just name all of the different things. Even in the church we bring them in, and Paul is telling us tonight, "If you want to mature, it has to do with unity." If you want to mature. If you want to -- if you will, colloquially speaking, grow up -- it has to do with unity. And diversity. Because, you see, in the church, unity and diversity are friends. Why? Because they came from the same source, and if we want to mature, then we have to understand God's call to unity and diversity and see how God brings them together to grow us up.

Paul launches us in this text and tells us, straight up -- "God is in the uniting business." He is. There should be nothing in the church that divides us when we accentuate what? What we have in common. That's Paul's opening line: "As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling." What's the calling? Goes back up to 3:10 -- 9, 10, and 11. "Now through the church the manifold wisdom of God's gonna be revealed." So He gives you this calling. "I want you to be the church. How do you pull it off? I'll tell you," Paul says. This is this calling that He's called us to. He says, "I want you to be humble and gentle and patient, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." God is in the uniting business, and the reason is, because that's how we bring ourselves to maturity. Separated people will never mature. Divided people will never mature. People who find themselves segregating and separating and identifying what distinguishes them -- they have committed themselves, Paul says, to immaturity at every level. Think about it. The person who is always focused on that which

divides never has the strength of another, and therefore has committed themselves to an immaturity. They've committed themselves to a weakness. They've committed themselves to separation of the strength of another person. And so, Paul starts off, and his point is -- if you want to mature, you have to understand that God is in the uniting business.

And he gives us three reasons for this. Number one is, he starts off with the theological grounds. What does he mean? He says there's one body, there's one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. One God and Father of all. Who is, by the way, over all and through all and in all. What's Paul's point? Get the idea! I don't care who you're sitting next to -- if Christ is in them, you are bound to them. God is in you and God is in them. You have the same Lord, you have the same baptism. By the way, you're going to stay in the same Heaven, and I know a lot of you -- "Well, we'll be different." Well, you better get along now! It's gonna be -- I mean, you don't want the first hundred years of your Heaven experience being, "I'm so sorry I treated you like a dirtball." You know, you don't want your first hundred years of Heaven being, "Oh, man -- I just -- I majored on the wrong things." You want your first years of Heaven living now! And theologically, you must understand that the Christ who saved you is the same Christ who saves everyone that is a believer. And that's Paul's point. You're not creating unity, you're sustaining it. You're not creating a peace and an alignment, you're living in it. There's a theological ground.

There's also a structural ground. "But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." And he goes on and he says, "To some he has given them to be evangelists. It was He -- Christ -- who gave some to be apostles and prophets and evangelists," et cetera. What's the purpose? Well, to prepare, to lead, to bring this church into a sense of unity structurally. You see, every church that God ever calls together, He gifts for the purpose of what? Works of service. Impact in the community. Reflection of the glory of God. And to do that, it has to have what? Leadership. It has to have evangelists. It has to have those who have pastoral gifting. It has to have those -- he goes further in this text -- those who have encouragement gifts, those who have administrative gifts. You see, structurally, we're put together like what? Like a symphony. And if you think of yourself in the church like a symphony, you need every part. I don't know if you've ever gone to a symphony of just flutes -- but it's kind of lacking something, with all due respect to you who are flautists. If you just go to nothing but -- you know, oboes, it's gonna be a long night. I mean, again -- if you're gonna go and listen to nothing but violas -- and you could go on, and just take the thing forever. The reality is, what makes a symphony beautiful is what? The diversity surrendered to the unity. And when you hear it, especially those of you who are musically trained -- you can all of a sudden discover the incredible movement of this team. You see, God is into uniting -- theologically, structurally, and also effectually. What happens? "We're no longer gonna be infants, he says -- verse 14 -- tossed back and forth." In other words, we're gonna grow up. "Blown here and there. In all things, we will grow up into Him who is" what? "The head that is Christ."

You see, the rationale for unity is this. God has made you one, He's gifted you to work like one so that you will grow up and be one. God is into the uniting business. "And therefore," Paul says, "He has given us grace." In Ephesians chapter 2, just a couple of verses before where we're at right now. You'll know it. You can say it with me. "We have been saved by grace through faith. It is a gift of God, not of our own works" -- because, "if it was of our own works, we would boast." What were we given? Grace. What did this grace do for us? Made us one in Christ. Made us, invited us into the church. Allowed us to come under the headship of Christ. Oh, but now, he says in verse 7, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it." He's shifting. Theologically he's talked about our unity. We hold together because of Christ. We hold together because of our baptism. We hold together because we come under God. But oh, also, what happens? We are uniquely and distinctly varied because of this grace. Because God's grace brings not only our unity, but also our diversity. In other words, what produces our unity is also what will produce our diversity.

Our world is pretty hot and heavy about diversity. The reality is, Jesus has been into diversity for well over 2000 years. It's not new, my friends. It's not something our world thought up. Don't give them the credit for that. Don't be afraid of diversity. Don't fight it. Celebrate it, just like Christ does. He does! Look at this text. It's a beautiful thing that He puts together. He says, "But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. That is why," it says, "when He ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave" what? "Gifts to men." Did he give everyone the same gift? Noooo. No. He gave all kinds of

different gifts! To some, He made them prophets. To others, evangelists. Some, He made pastors and teachers. What purpose? Well, to prepare God's people. What characterizes His gifts? They're diverse. You see, the same giver that gives us the one baptism gives us the uniqueness, the diversity of the gifts. They're not polarizing. They're not in competition. They actually, like a symphony, respect each other and work together. Why? Because it's the same grace. The grace that saved you diversified you. The grace that saved you and called you to Christ is the same one that made you wonderfully unique and gifted you so different than the person sitting next to you. Hallelujah! But you see, in the kingdom of God, unity and diversity are never, ever pitted against each other. They're not enemies, they're friends. So the idea of acknowledging diversity, the idea of acknowledging somebody that is different -- it's not new to our culture. Don't take the credit! Jesus has been preaching that for a long time. And by the way -- He's the one, the Scripture says, that apportioned it. Christ is the one who perfectly apportioned the various gifts. That's what the Scripture says. "But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."

1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 11 -- you can write this one down. It says, "It is the Spirit who apportions -- or, distributes to each one individually -- as He wills." Why is that so important? Because in culture and in life, we see a supply-and-demand issue. Don't we? We've tragically seen and witnessed a supply/demand issue of toilet paper. I can't explain it -- don't know why, but it's happening again. And they've had to put limits on how many. I don't know why people have fallen in love with buying big boxes of toilet paper and storing it up in their attic. I'm not sure what's going on. But all of a sudden, people have discovered that toilet paper is like -- huh -- the big stuff! I'm wondering if people are gonna give it away this year for Christmas! Because they're storing it up and they're putting rations on this. We have it all kinds of times. In our day, if you're a nurse, I am telling you, let me tell you, you're a hot commodity. You know that. I mean, you could pretty much choose the city you want to serve in. Because -- why? We are so low on nurses. High on lawyers, low on nurses. Don't become a lawyer -- become a nurse. We need a few lawyers. Counselors? Who hoo! They tell us there's one on every other corner. The reality is, those things ebb and flow -- and they do. General practitioners, they say, "Man, I'm telling you, it's hard to find 'em." Try finding a new general practitioner nowadays and getting in to their schedule. It's hard!

What Christ is telling you is -- you're never going to have a supply/demand issue in the church. Why? Because Christ has taken it upon himself to apportion, to distribute. In fact, let me identify three times in this text. Once it says, "As Christ apportioned," once it says, "And He gave gifts to men," and the third, "It was He who gave." Why does he tell you three times in a short passage that statement? It's because he wants you to understand that when you became a believer, it wasn't your choice what gift you got. It's not. And if that's new to you, let me be the first to help you understand that. When you become a believer, Christ indwells you, He saves you, the Holy Spirit renews your heart, and gives you a regenerate heart, and your mind is being transformed. One of the amazing things that this text tells you is that you were empowered with a supernatural spiritual gift. What are they? Well, there's five different sections in the New Testament that describe these lists. None of the lists are the same. So, it's pretty tough, I think, to hold this exact number -- "These are the ones that we know," when the reality is, when you look at all five different locations -- 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 and others -- the lists are different. None of them are the same. They have some overlap, but they're all distinct. But what the text tells you in 1 Corinthians 12, and in Ephesians 4, is distinctly this: It is Christ, it is the Holy Spirit -- in other words, it is God who distributes to the church the variety of gifts, and they are varied.

You see, every one of you has one. In fact, I would argue probably all people have a manifestation of usually two to three. And they're varied. They're different. That's what makes the church so beautiful. And by the way -- and I mean this sincerely -- it makes the church the picture-perfect model to the world, who is after inclusion and is passionate about diversity. I say to them -- look at the church. We've been wrestling with this for 2000 years. We don't do it perfectly. But you see, in the church, we've been wrestling and honoring unity and diversity, equality and uniqueness, for 2000 years. You don't wanna get rid of either of them! You can't get rid of equality in deference to diversity. And diversity can never trump equality. In other words, there's no one individual or one gift that somehow trumps the other and makes it somehow better than everybody else. You have to hold onto them. But the text is really clear -- each one differs. There's no list. But the structure is given to us in this text about leadership. It goes on and talks in other texts about the various kinds of gifts.

You say, "Pastor, how do I know what mine are?" Let me give you a very simple two-step to do it. Number one, if Christ gave them to you -- and He did -- and they are in you, undeniable, and I believe that the Scripture says absolutely you have them -- then I would look at number one, what are the passions? What are the things that you naturally gravitate towards? When you are with a group of people, do you find yourself wanting to organize them? And do you find when people are disorganized, it drives you crazy? Take note of that. When you are with a group of people, do you find yourself always kind of moving to the person who's really had it pretty tough, and you just find yourself being kind. Kind of merciful. I would say, number one, to be quite honest with you, watch yourself. What do you do when you're around people?

When you're with a group of people, do you find yourself, like, "Man, you know what? I think if we work together, we could take this hill! I've got a solution about this homeless thing. Boy, what" -- and you find yourself casting vision and charting a course. Watch your passions. Why? Because, my friends, you're not creating something -- you're revealing what Christ has put into your heart. Christ has apportioned it. He's made some pastors and teachers, and some leaders, and some evangelists, and the reality is, I can always tell an evangelist. Man, they're forever going, "I tell you what -- we just gotta" -- I mean, they love you -- evangelists love you -- but to be quite honest with you, they don't wanna spend any time with you. Don't be offended by that. You know who the evangelists wanna spend time with? People that are gonna go to hell. Because they want to share the gospel with them. And evangelists, when they come into a church budget, they're always looking at that, "Why are we spending so much money on ourselves? I mean, we should be about the lost." This brother that we're bringing in two weeks from now -- he's an evangelist, straight-up. He absolutely just breathes fire for evangelism. And he wants to spread that to everybody. Watch your passions, number one.

Number two -- watch your back. What do I mean by that? Not protecting yourself -- watch the wake that comes behind you. If you're a leader, there will be people who line up behind you. If you're an encourager, there will be people who say, "Do you know, I'm telling you what -- I was really having a bad Wednesday 'til you showed up. My stars! I mean, man, one hour with you and I felt like I could walk on water." "Really?" "Yes. Thank you so much." Watch the wake behind you. Two things, it's real simple: Watch your passions. What are the things you love? What are the things that just stir up into you? What are the things that happen inside of you that you don't have to tell yourself? Kind of like hunger. I never tell myself, "You know what, Mark? You should really be hungry." It just kinda naturally happens! Too often! The same thing with spiritual gifts. It naturally bubbles up.

But also watch your wake. And this -- and you need to be honest. And by the way, I would encourage you to get some really good friends to help you be honest. There's a lot of people who think they're leaders, that when you turn around, there's no one following them. You're not a leader. You are a leader in your mind, but you're not a leader in reality. There's a lot of people who think they have the gift of teaching, and the fact is, when they teach, people will go, "Whooo hoo -- boy. I have no idea what that text said. When I listen to you, it's confusing." This one person I know -- just absolutely convinced that they have the gift of teaching. The reality is, when I am with this individual, I mean, I just walk away and wanna hit my head against the wall! It's like, confusing. That's probably not the gift of teaching. That person is gifted, absolutely. But you must be willing, because the character of spiritual gifts is what? Extremely varied. And it is apportioned by Christ, and because of that, they're given to you. You don't have to make them up. He will give them to you. What's their purpose? For service. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth.

And then he says in verse 16 -- "From him the whole body is joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love. As each one or each part does its work." Maybe one of the worst things that's ever happened in the church is to professionalize pastors. I know I'm trying to talk myself out of a job, and I'd just as soon not do that for at least seven more years. But the reality is, there's a danger in that, my friends. And I understand that we're pastors here. And I understand that some of them became vocational pastors, and Paul's the one who said, you know, that the oxen is worthy of being paid. But one of the great dangers is that you don't understand how important you are. And you don't understand that if you don't use your gifts, the church is gonna be weak. If you don't use your gifts, we're gonna have a level of immaturity that we wouldn't have if you did serve. Because the purpose of grace is for service. It's for us to work. What happens when you do it? Number one, we're stabilized.

I've been around the church for a long time -- 59 years. I've seen really, really unstable churches, and I've seen really, really stable churches. Stable churches transition pastors really well. Unstable churches crash. Stable churches face COVID issues pretty well. Unstable churches can close. Stable churches endure the difficulties of homelessness. Unstable churches fight it and get angry and quit. See, when we all work, it develops what? A maturity. We're not tossed back and forth. We're stabilized.

There's a second benefit, and that is we increase in love. Absolutely, we increase in love. When you serve, it enables you to love people and draws you closer to each other. And it increases this unity that Paul is talking about. There's a sense of which our unity is given to us by Christ. And there's also a sense of which we strengthen our unity by maturing in Christ. And one of the things that happens -- when I came here, I remember, because every church I've ever gone to has always had worship wars. We fight about the music. And I remember -- I'll never forget this. Somebody asked me in one of those audition moments where they were asking me questions, "What are you gonna do, Pastor, to unify our worship?" And I told them, simply, "I can't. Never have." Worship doesn't unify. Mission does. The reality is, you like the music you like. That's wonderful. I like the music I like. Mine's pretty varied -- but the fact is, we have different likes about worship. We do. But one of the things that happens when I put my shoulder next to a person -- and it doesn't matter the age, it can be somebody 13, it can be somebody 90. When we put our shoulders together and we work and we discover that we really need each other, and that we can learn from each other, and we can grow together, something happens. It just starts bringing you together.

It's a little bit like prayer. It is. Do you realize that only two percent of couples pray together every day, regularly? Here's another statistic, though -- it'll blow your mind. Do you realize that for those couples that pray regularly, 99 percent of them stay married until they die? You want to divorce-proof your marriage? Pray. Straight-up. Kneel down, shoulder-to-shoulder, and pray. And why? It's because when you become intimate with the Father, it brings an intimacy to yourself. It's the same way -- when you serve together, when you come together, when you pray together, something happens. God begins to knit your hearts, and you begin to love each other in a way, and that's the power of grace that teaches us how to serve. And by the way, when you serve, you'll learn something from God every time. When you humble yourself, Paul says, "Be completely humble, gentle, patient." When you humble yourself to serve other people -- at their pace, at their gift mix. When you're one of those individuals gifted in administration, and you hang around a person with mercy and faith -- and they are gonna drive you insane! And the reality is, when you submit yourself to them, something of patience grows in you. Something of love for them and appreciation for how God made them so much different than you. But oh, how beautiful. Because without them, the symphony would never play. The purpose of grace is for service. Teaches us to grab ahold of the plow. It gives us a different love for each other. Teaches us something about God. And by the way, it matures us. Makes us stable. It makes us gracious. And it makes us courageous. It really does.

There was an article that came out a number of years ago -- in The Atlantic. And they were asking, there was a reporter who was interviewing Domingo and Pavarotti and those of the three tenors. And for whatever reason, the reporter was asking about competitiveness. He says, "Do you guys ever have any competitiveness in your singing?" Pavarotti said, "You have to put all of your concentration into opening your heart to the music. You can't be rivals when you're making music together." You can't be rivals when you're living unity together. When you understand that Christ is in you. You can't be rivals when you understand the power of unity and diversity as the pathway to maturity. You can't afford to be competitive, because competition in that light will sever your maturity. It'll weaken it. You can't afford it. And so, you have to learn -- it's hard because people are different. But in the kingdom of God, unity and diversity -- they're not at odds. They're friends. Why? Because they're both gifts of grace.